



EDITED BY

MARK  
EDWARDS

DIMITRIOS  
PALLIS

GEORGIOS  
STEIRIS

≡ The Oxford Handbook of  
DIONYSIUS THE  
AREOPAGITE

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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AREOPAGITE**

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DIONYSIUS THE  
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*Edited by*  
MARK EDWARDS,  
DIMITRIOS PALLIS,  
*and*  
GEORGIOS STEIRIS

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Michael Allen** is Distinguished Research Professor of English and Italian Renaissance Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles. His publications include translations of many works by Marsilio Ficino, together with *Icastes* (1994), *Nuptial Arithmetic* (1998), *Synoptic Art* (2006) and *Studies in the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico* (2017).

**George Arabatzis** is Associate Professor of Byzantine Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. He studied philosophy in Paris, where he obtained his PhD from the École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. He was a researcher at the Research Center for Greek Philosophy of the Academy of Athens from 1998 to 2012. He has also been a visiting scholar at various academic institutions, where he gave lectures and taught philosophy. His published work includes six monographs and numerous articles in the field of Byzantine philosophy as well as its ancient sources and its modern perception. One of his main fields of expertise is medieval and modern iconology.

**Bogdan G. Bucur** is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Theology at McNulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University. His publications include *Angelomorphic Pneumatology* (2009) and *Scripture Re-Envisioned* (2018).

**Deirdre Carabine** is a retired academic who has held posts at Queen's Belfast, University College Dublin, and at various universities in Uganda. She specializes in the philosophy of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, concentrating on the negative or apophatic theology. She is the author of *The Unknown God*, *John Scottus Eriugena*, and is currently working on a follow-up volume on negative theology from the Victorines to Martin Luther.

**Maximos Conostas** The Very Rev. Archimandrite Maximos Conostas is Professor of Patristics and Orthodox Spirituality at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, MA, USA. His recent publications include an edition and translation of Maximus the Confessor, *The Ambigua*, and a translation of the same author's *Responses to the Questions of Thalassios*.

**Ysabel de Andia** studied at the Sorbonne and taught at the Lycée and at the University (Lille) before finishing her career as director of research at the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). She obtained a doctorate at the Sorbonne on 'Denys the Areopagite' and a doctorate in theology at the Gregorian University in Rome on 'Irenaeus of Lyon' with Father Antonio Orbe.

**John Dillon** was Professor of Greek at Trinity College Dublin until 2006. His books include *The Middle Platonists* (1977), *The Golden Chain* (1991), *The Great Tradition* (1997) and *The Heirs of Plato* (2003).

**Mark Edwards** has been Tutor in Theology at Christ Church, Oxford since 1993, and also University Lecturer/Associate Professor in Patristics in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford. Since 2014 he has held the title Professor of Early Christian Studies. His books include *Neoplatonic Saints* (2000), *Origen against Plato* (2002), *John through the Centuries* (2003), *Culture and Philosophy in the Age of Plotinus* (2006), *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (2009), *Image, Word and God in the Early Christian Centuries* (2012), *Religions of the Constantinian Empire* (2015), and *Aristotle and Early Christian Thought* (2019).

**Emiliano Fiori** holds a double doctoral degree from the University of Bologna and the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris. He worked at the Free University of Amsterdam and at Humboldt University, Berlin, and is currently associate professor of Early Christian Literature at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He is the recipient of an ERC Starting Grant (2018–2023) focusing on Syriac and Christian Arabic intellectual history at the end of the first millennium CE.

**György Geréby** is associate professor at the Medieval Studies Department, Central European University, Vienna–Budapest. He held the Isaiah Berlin lectures, Oxford, 2018; was Keeley Visiting Fellow, Wadham College, Oxford, 2013/14 and Fulbright Teaching Fellow at Rutgers University, 2004. Areas of specialization: late antique and medieval philosophy and theology, including political theology.

**Wayne J. Hankey** retired as Professor of Classics, Dalhousie University, and Editor of *Dionysius* after more than fifty years of university teaching, administration, and publication. His *God in Himself, Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae* was reprinted in 2000 as an Oxford Scholarly Classic. His most recent monograph is *Aquinas' Neoplatonism in the Summa Theologiae on God. A Short Introduction*, 2019. He has published more than one hundred scholarly articles, reviews, and chapters. His principal publications concern the Platonic tradition with extended attention to Philo of Alexandria, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Augustine, Proclus, Dionysius, Eriugena, Anselm, Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Nicholas of Cusa, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jean Trouillard.

**Timothy Knepper** is Professor of Philosophy at Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa, where he directs The Comparison Project, a public programme in global comparative religion and local-lived religion. He is the author of books on the future of the philosophy of religion (*The Ends of Philosophy of Religion*, 2013) and the sixth-century Christian mystic known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*Negating Negation*, 2014). He is also the editor of student-written photo-narratives about religion in Des Moines (*A Spectrum of Faith*, 2017) and in Beijing (*Religions of Beijing*, 2020), as well as of The Comparison Project's lecture and dialogue series on ineffability (*Ineffability: An Exercise*



in *Comparative Philosophy of Religion*, 2017), and death and dying (*Death and Dying: An Exercise in Comparative Philosophy of Religion*, 2019).

**Theo Kobusch** studied philosophy, Greek and Latin in Giessen and Bern. He received doctorate with the dissertation ‘Studies on the Philosophy of Hierocles of Alexandria’ at the University of Giessen and was a research assistant in the department for basic philosophical questions in theology at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen. Since 2017 has been an honorary doctor of the Ilia State University Tbilisi.

**Declan Lawell** completed his PhD in The Queen’s University of Belfast, with a thesis on ‘Thomas Gallus, Jean-Luc Marion, and the Reception of Dionysian Neoplatonism’. He has completed two critical editions of the works of Thomas Gallus, the *Explanatio* of the Dionysian corpus, in addition to the *Glosses* on the Angelic Hierarchy, as well as a critical edition of the *Commentary* on the Celestial Hierarchy by Robert Grosseteste. He has published multiple articles on Thomas Gallus, and given lectures in Paris and Vercelli on his thought. He currently teaches Latin in The Liverpool Blue Coat School.

**Andrew Louth FBA** is Professor Emeritus, University of Durham, and archpriest of the Moscow Patriarchate. A patristics scholar, his books include *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (1981; 2007), *Denys the Areopagite* (1989), *Maximus the Confessor* (1996), *St John Damascene* (2002), and *Modern Orthodox Thinkers* (2015).

**Michael Motia** is Lecturer in Religion in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. His book *Imitations of Infinity: Gregory of Nyssa and the Transformations of Mimesis* was published in 2021.

**Dimitrios Pallis** is an independent researcher specializing in theology and philosophy in late antique Christian Platonism and modern Greek Orthodox thought. He is the author of twenty book chapters and research articles and a treatise in these areas. He has been awarded three prizes for studies on Dionysius the Areopagite from the University of Oxford, the University of Athens, and the Academy of Athens respectively. Recent publications include: *A ‘Neobyzantine’ Cultural Proposal?: A Critical Appraisal of the Assimilation of Areopagitic Apophaticism in the Early Thought of Christos Yannaras* (2017) and *‘Constructed Self’ and Christian Mysticism in Dionysius the Areopagite and his Place in the Orthodox Tradition* (2018/2019).

**István Perczel** is Professor of Byzantine and Eastern Christian Studies in the Department of Medieval Studies at Central European University, Vienna–Budapest, Hungary. He has extensively worked on Late Antique and Patristic philosophy as well as Syriac Christianity, including the communities of South India. One of his research projects is on Christian Platonism and Byzantine theology, within which he has published studies on Saint Antony, Evagrius of Pontus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the sixth-century Origenist movement, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian and John Italus.

**Ilaria Ramelli** is Professor of the Early Church at the University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, and has held senior fellowships and visiting and honorary professorships,

including at the universities of Princeton, Harvard, Stanford, Columbia, Erfurt, Durham, Oxford and Cambridge. Her books include *Allegoria* (2004), *Terms for Eternity* (2013), *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* (2013), *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery* (2017), *A Larger Hope* (2019) and *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Ancient Christianity* (2021).

**Tim Riggs** is post-doctoral researcher at the University of Jyväskylä, in Finland. He has written numerous articles on the various manifestations of Neoplatonic philosophical psychology and their ethical and metaphysical foundations and implications.

**Antonio Rigo** is Professor of Byzantine Philology and History of Byzantine Christianity at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. His research engages with the literature and religious history of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods, and in particular with the ascetic-spiritual texts, heretical and dissident movements, and theological controversies of the fourteenth century.

**Denis J.-J. Robichaud** earned his PhD from the Johns Hopkins University and is an Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame. He has published on ancient, medieval, and Renaissance Platonism, the philosophy of religion, Renaissance humanism, the history of scholarship, as well as philology and manuscript studies. University of Pennsylvania Press published his book *Plato's Persona: Marsilio Ficino, Renaissance Humanism, and Platonic Traditions* in 2018. He won the Phyllis W. G. Gordan/National Endowment for the Humanities Rome Post-Doctoral Prize and was a resident fellow at the American Academy in Rome, and is presently the Jean-François Malle Fellow at Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies.

**Paul Rorem** is the Warfield Professor (Emeritus) of medieval Church history at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ, USA. He is the author of books on Dionysius, the Dionysian scholia by John of Scythopolis, Eriugena's commentary on Dionysius, and Hugh of St Victor.

**Christian Schäfer** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bamberg. He has published widely on ancient and medieval philosophy; his books include *Unde malum? Die Frage nach dem Woher des Bösen bei Plotin, Augustinus und Dionysius vom Areopag* (2002), and *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (2006).

**Charles M. Stang** is Professor of Early Christian Thought and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School. He is the author of *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: 'No Longer I'* (2012), and *Our Divine Double* (2016).

**Georgios Steiris** is currently Associate Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. He previously taught at the University of Peloponnese and the Hellenic Open University. He has been Visiting Professor at Jyväskylä University. He has served as Secretary-General of the Greek Philosophical Society (2015–2016). He was

awarded the Golden Jubilee Medal ‘80 years of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University’. He co-edited the volume *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher* (2017).

**Beate Regina Suchla** is Professor of Philosophy at the Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany. Her research interests are in ancient and medieval philosophy, and especially in Neoplatonism. She published many articles, reviews, and books, including the monograph *Dionysius Areopagita. Leben – Werk – Wirkung* and the critical editions *Corpus Dionysiacum I: Dionysii Areopagitae liber De divinis nominibus* and *Corpus Dionysiacum IV/1: Ioannis Scythopolitani prologus et scholia in Dionysii Areopagitae librum De divinis nominibus*.

**Monica Tobon** holds a BA in Philosophy and an MA and PhD in Classics, all from University College London, where she is currently an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Greek and Latin. She lectured in various areas of philosophy and the history of Christian Spirituality at the Franciscan International Study Centre in Canterbury, UK, from 2010 until its closure in 2017, since when she has focused primarily on research and writing. She has previously published on Bonaventure, Evagrius, and disability in the early Church, and has publications forthcoming on Dionysius and Evagrius, including a monograph on the latter under contract with Routledge.

**Torstein Theodor Tollefsen** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oslo. He works mainly on metaphysical topics in pagan and Christian thought in late antiquity.

**Peter Tyler** is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Spirituality and Director of the Centre for Initiatives in Spirituality and Reconciliation (InSpiRe) at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London. His most recent work is *Christian Mindfulness: Theology and Practice* 2018.

**Johannes Zachhuber** is Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at the University of Oxford. After his DPhil (Oxford 1998), he worked at Humboldt University of Berlin until taking up his current position in 2005. His publications include *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (1999); *Theology as Science in Nineteenth Century Germany: From F. C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* (2013); and *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics* (2020).

## CHAPTER 1

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# INTRODUCTION

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MARK EDWARDS, DIMITRIOS PALLIS,  
AND GEORGIOS STEIRIS

THE papers which form the nucleus of this volume were delivered at a conference on the *Corpus Dionysiacum*,<sup>1</sup> organized by Dimitrios Pallis under the auspices of the universities of Oxford and Athens, the one providing the venue and the other the bulk of the funding for the event. It was a condition of the funding that the proceedings should be published, but it seemed to the organizers (Mr Pallis, Professor Edwards of Oxford, and Professor Steiris of Athens) that the interests of scholarship would be better served by a more comprehensive collection of studies, embracing not only the afterlife of the corpus but its origin and its antecedents, which would be suitable in quality and dimension to be published as a Handbook by Oxford University Press. The editors are grateful to those who delivered their papers at the original conference, and equally to those who answered requests to furnish supplementary essays. As a name for the Handbook they have chosen not the formidable title of the conference but the fanciful appellation that the author of the corpus gave to himself, in its Latin rather than its French variant, and without any cautionary prefix ('pseudo-Dionysius' or 'Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite') to preserve the unwary reader from deception. It may be useful, since we can write no biography of the man, to begin this introduction with a brief history of the name.

According to the *Life of Dionysius* by the Byzantine scholar Michael Syncellus (c. 761–846), he was a native Athenian who sensed the first unconscious stirring of faith when, in the company of the sophist Apollophanes, he witnessed the darkening of the earth by an unforeseen eclipse.<sup>2</sup> When the meaning of this event was revealed to him by Paul on the Areopagus, he became one of the most intimate disciples of the Apostle and was made the first bishop of the church in Athens.<sup>3</sup> He adorned this office both by his virtues and by his erudition, producing the works that now make up the Dionysian corpus. Accused by Apollophanes of no longer handling that which belonged to his ancestors in the ancestral manner, he answered that Apollophanes had not learned to handle that which belonged to God in a godly manner (*Patrologia Graeca* [henceforth PG] 4,

628B–C; Podolak 2015: 229). Symeon Metaphrastes (died c. 1000) relates that, ‘desiring to multiply his talent’ as Christ enjoins, he left Athens for Rome and quickly entered the inner circle of its bishop Clement (PG 4, 593D; cf. also PG 115, 1036D). At Clement’s behest—or, as Michael Syncellus prefers, to escape the persecution of Trajan—he travelled to Gaul, where he fell victim to a ferocious persecution.<sup>4</sup> A later hagiographer records that after he and his companions had been beheaded, Dionysius rose and took his head from the executioner—a parenthesis hints, however, that this miracle was witnessed only with the eyes of faith.<sup>5</sup> These accounts explain how St Dionysius of Athens became St Denis of Paris,<sup>6</sup> but not why his writings remained so long unknown or why, when they came to light in the course of the Christological controversy in the sixth century, they were found to have less in common with the works of accredited Fathers of the Church than with those of pagan philosophers who were not long dead. The response of John Philoponus,<sup>7</sup> of the lexicon known as the *Suda*<sup>8</sup> and of a Christian editor of Proclus<sup>9</sup> is that the Platonists of Athens purloined his writings and contrived for the next five centuries to pass off their garbled paraphrases as an original philosophy.

If we say then that Koch and Stiglmayr, whose labours are documented by Christian Schäfer in this volume, were the first to expose the dependence of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* on Proclus,<sup>10</sup> we must recognize that they differed from their Byzantine and Latin forerunners not so much in the rigour of their scholarship (for the kinship with the Neoplatonists never went unnoticed) as in their willingness to dethrone a saint.<sup>11</sup> Lorenzo Valla too, as Denis Robichaud demonstrates, was not the only Humanist to perceive the difficulties of the traditional attribution; Valla himself (though he also unmasked the *Donation of Constantine*) never intended to become Luther’s ally in the subversion of the papacy. The result of Luther’s repudiation of Dionysius as one who has ‘nothing to say of Christ’ was not, as Johannes Zachhuber shows in two related papers, the total extinction of interest in this author among his followers: the asperity of Anders Nygren’s assault on mysticism becomes intelligible when we see how readily some Lutherans took Dionysius as their guide to the state of being *coram Deo*, in the presence of God, which Luther intended in quite a different sense. The English poets and theologians whom Andrew Louth reviews here were equally responsive to the mystical strain in Dionysius, equally indifferent to the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the first of which presented an obsolete picture of the cosmos, the second a pattern of churchmanship to which, had it ever been realized, they could never have subscribed.

This Protestant Dionysius, as we may call him, had become the nameless prototype of the lone pilgrim who seeks his God in the ever-receding uplands of the mind. There is no *Celestial Hierarchy*, no *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, no epistolary fiction in the *Bampton Lectures* of William Ralph Inge, the Anglican rationalist,<sup>12</sup> or the seminal translation of C. E. Rolt, with its prefatory allusions to McTaggart, Amiel, Pascal, St Bernard, and Thomas à Kempis before it mentions the ‘scriptural basis’.<sup>13</sup> Scholars who had lost faith in the inerrancy of Scripture and in the Church’s monopoly of exegesis coined the word ‘mysticism’ to denote the cultivation of an inward state of readiness for God. Wherever the title of Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology* was better known than its contents, it would be

cited as the fountainhead of a practice of nescient consciousness, which emptied the mind to make room for love or faith but was largely indifferent to the scriptural or liturgical affirmations which are the scaffolding of the mystical ascent in Dionysius. The darkness into which he invited the reader was often assumed, with little textual warrant, to be of a piece with the purposeful self-diremption of the intellect enjoined by the *Cloud of Unknowing*, with the spiritual desolation suffered by John of the Cross or even (as we learn from Timothy Knepper's essay in this volume) with the perpetual deferral of the signified in the postmodern theorisation of the sign. Even some of the Orthodox thinkers surveyed by Dimitrios Pallis in this volume have been apt to treat Dionysius as a philosopher, an ontologist of absence, paying little attention to his avowed project of elucidating the figurative vocabulary of the Bible. Only in recent decades have readers from this, let alone from any other, communion, addressed the Dionysian corpus as a whole: Andrew Louth and Alexander Golitzin have perceived what eluded Inge and Nygren, that even the hermeneutic quest will founder if the soul attempts to be its own teacher, spurning the assistance of the 'ecclesiastical hierarchy' and the angels who form a nine-runged chain of love from heaven to earth.<sup>14</sup>

This emphasis on the liturgical strain in Dionysius seems to be a phenomenon of twentieth-century scholarship. As the papers by Beate Regina Suchla and Maximos Conostas reveal, the chief concern of his early Byzantine readers John of Scythopolis and Maximus the Confessor was to compensate for apparent heterodoxies or lacunae in his teaching on the most elementary articles of belief. John of Damascus, as Edwards and Pallis argue, borrows not only the language of negation from Dionysius but some hints towards a theology of the image; the Dionysian legacy, however, did not fall indivisibly into the hands of the iconophiles, as we learn from the paper by George Arabatzis on Dionysius and Theodore the Studite. Many of its most celebrated interpreters, after all, were the Christian heirs of Greek philosophy, for whom the intellect was the proper organ for the knowledge of the ineffable. Deirdre Carabine demonstrates that the Dionysian theme of procession and return was the linchpin of Eriugena's cosmology, while Theo Kobusch investigates the evolution in Nicholas of Cusa of a concept of non-alterity (*non aliud*) which escapes the incongruity of giving such names as 'God', 'the One', or 'the Good' to that which lies beyond all names. His contemporary Marsilio Ficino found in the works of Dionysius a charter for the harmonisation of Plato with Christianity, imagining (as Michael Allen and Mark Edwards observe) that he was thus doing openly what the pagan Neoplatonists had achieved by plagiarism. Readers of Georgios Steiris's contribution to this volume may be surprised to discover that, in his appropriation of Dionysius, Gemistus Pletho revealed himself to be both a strict monotheist and the advocate of a popular metaphysics in pursuit of political ends. Between Eriugena and the Renaissance, the works of Plato and Proclus were barely known at first hand, so that Albert the Great and his pupil Aquinas, as Wayne Hankey argues, could sever Dionysius from the Platonic tradition and treat him as the heir to Aristotle. But, as in their Franciscan precursors Alexander of Hales<sup>15</sup> and Robert Grosseteste (whose translation of Dionysius is the subject of a paper by Declan Lawell), the Aristotelian Dionysius begets a Dionysian Aristotle, quite unlike his namesake in modern histories



of philosophy, who has no suspicion of any reality other than that which is handled, heard, and seen.

Between the Middle Ages and the present, ‘mysticism’ came to signify not merely the penetration of divine secrets but the enjoyment of communion with God through the deliberate heightening of our internal capacities. Although it does not yet mean this in Dionysius (as Ysabel de Andia demonstrates here), we apply the term without misgiving to Gregory Palamas, whose application to Christian experience of the distinction between the essence and the energies of God is discussed by Torstein Tollefsen. Mark Edwards observes, in his essay on three modern theologians, that if he is read through Palamas (with Lossky) or through Maximus (with von Balthasar), Dionysius exhibits none of the sterile enmity to life that is imputed to him by Inge. For many Latin Christians, the *Celestial Hierarchy* was the bridge between the meditative and the contemplative senses of the term ‘mystical’.<sup>16</sup> This work was the first to receive a Latin commentary, the only work by Hugh of St Victor, according to Paul Rorem, that acknowledges Dionysius as the fountainhead of the apophatic theology which, here as elsewhere, he combines with the anagogic reading of Scripture. In discussing the translations<sup>17</sup> of John Sarracenus, Mark Edwards notes that his version of the *Celestial Hierarchy* provided the basis for the glosses of Thomas Gallus, who (as Declan Lawell demonstrates) not only wove the *Celestial Hierarchy* into his itinerary from reason to love in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, but composed a treatise on living like the angels. Monica Tobon argues that the Franciscan tradition to which Bonaventure belongs had developed a similarly anagogic understanding of love, which she holds to be faithful to the teaching of Dionysius. The *Celestial Hierarchy* is also the only text in the Dionysian corpus to which Mark Edwards (in consultation with Tamara Pollack) finds unambiguous references in Dante. And while it appears to be of little interest to the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Peter Tyler shows that in Hugh of Balma it found a Carthusian reader of less exclusive sympathies. A number of these medieval recipients of the corpus were as indifferent to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* as modern interpreters are to the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and perhaps it is only in the late Byzantine figures surveyed here by Antonio Rigo that a balance between them was maintained.

The chapters at the beginning of this volume should be read with special care by those who imagine—if such there be in these latter days—that the apophaticism of Dionysius is an innovation, foreign to the spirit of Christianity. Maximos Constas argues that he exploits the writings, not only the name, of Paul, while Bogdan Bucur observes that he owes to Clement not only an insistence on divine ineffability to balance the anthropomorphism of Scripture, but the first conception of a celestial hierarchy, if not under that name. Ilaria Ramelli, who has given much study elsewhere to the shaping of Evagrian spirituality by Origen’s metaphysics, explores the contribution made by both to the contemplative philosophy of Dionysius, while Michael Motia compares his precepts for penetrating the darkness of Scripture to Gregory of Nyssa’s meditation on the ascent of Mount Sinai by Moses. No one pretends that the Bible is the only source of these linguistic prolusions, and Charles Stang finds it remarkable that he borrows so openly from the vocabulary of the Neoplatonists. This being said, his Christian premises oblige

him, as Mark Edwards and John Dillon point out, to conflate the ineffable One with the realm of being, and to make God himself the sole subject of theurgy, with results that would seem to Iamblichus and Proclus to sit rather beneath than beyond the bounds of logic. Riggs is clearly right in his understanding of the Dionysian system as a confluence of Christian and Platonic traditions; it is profitable to remember, however, that in the first extant manuscript of the corpus (as Suchla reports) its Christian tenor is accentuated by the addition of three works by John Philoponus and the commentaries of John of Scythopolis. Doubts as to whether the Greek that has come down to us is the original text would therefore be warranted even if we did not possess a Syriac translation which appears to some scholars to furnish evidence of more primitive readings. The current debate between scholars on this matter is a keen one, and we have left intact the competing observations of István Perczel and Emiliano Fiori.

The enigma of Dionysius, therefore, does not lie wholly in his pseudonymity. Even if we were to learn on incontestable authority that he was, let us say, Eusebius the pupil of the Athenian Neoplatonist Isidorus,<sup>18</sup> that would not suffice to tell us which of our competing recensions, the Syriac or the Greek, is the more original; it would not tell us whether his object was to convert his fellow students to Christianity, to satisfy his own thirst for an intellectual system or to prove to his co-religionists that Platonism need not be the enemy of faith.<sup>19</sup> It is possible, after all, to put this second question to Clement of Alexandria and remain unsure of an answer, just as it is possible to believe that we have remains of at least three letters by Ignatius of Antioch without being certain whether the Greek or the Syriac version is the more primitive.<sup>20</sup> Even if all these problems were resolved, it would be left to us to achieve a synthesis of all five writings, without making Dionysius wholly a churchman, wholly a mystic or wholly a philosopher. György Geréby argues that if we reverse the bias of the medieval period and ignore the angelology of the corpus, we shall miss the political element which ought to make a peculiar appeal to the modern world. Of course he is not the only author of ancient times who shows his trunk to one inquirer and his tail to another: who has done justice to the whole of Plato, the whole of Aristotle, or even—dare one say it—the whole of Paul? It is arguable indeed that a more comprehensive understanding of these authors, cemented by a clear perception of all that they have in common, is a precondition of studying any book in the Dionysian corpus, let alone of interpreting the corpus as a whole.

At the same time, it is true that the author compounds our difficulties by alluding to works of his own whose very existence is in doubt, together with those of his putative teacher Hierotheus. Questions relating to these works were raised not only by the developments of modern scholarship but even by the readers of the corpus in ancient times.<sup>21</sup> It is also true this author's apparent success in assuming a false identity creates its own riddles, for his age was not one in which forgeries could hope as a matter of course to pass undetected. Most of the acts and gospels produced in the names of the apostles had already been rejected; Origen's defenders had cited undisputed instances of forgery in support of their contention that his works had been falsified by his detractors; the watchword of those who opposed Chalcedon in the name of Cyril—'one nature of the divine Word enfleshed'—was soon to be exposed as an unwitting quotation from the

heretic Apollinarius.<sup>22</sup> And yet not only the Dionysian corpus but an amplified redaction of the letters of Ignatius<sup>23</sup> and eight books of *Apostolic Constitutions* purporting to have been edited by Clement of Rome were accepted as genuine in the early Byzantine era by authors of some erudition and discernment.<sup>24</sup> Lest we imagine that Christians were peculiarly credulous, we should remember how many Orphic texts are cited for the first time by the Platonists of late antiquity. We may find it curious nevertheless that, except in one particularly late and extensive catalogue,<sup>25</sup> the works of this putative friend of Paul appear in none of the numerous appendices to the New Testament, which so often include not only Hermas, Barnabas, and some form of the *Didache*, but other books which are now lost or of less repute.

We ask, with little hope of illumination, whether those who embraced these late pseudepigrapha were really deceived or were merely acknowledging the authority of their contents by accepting the fiction of authorship.<sup>26</sup> The success of the Dionysian writings is all the more remarkable because there was no primitive text—no equivalent to the *Didache* or the letter of Ignatius to the Romans—to provide a nucleus for the forgery. And it is Dionysius, not the false Ignatius or the false Clement, who became at once the teacher and the mouthpiece of ascetics and contemplatives, bishops and scholars, Platonists, Hegelian and postmodernist, with scarcely any loss of honour or influence even where his apostolicity had been thoroughly exploded. The swollen Ignatius never completely displaced the middle recensions of his letters, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* were seldom of interest to anyone but canonists and jurists, who were not afraid to question their integrity.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, without the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, there would have been no Maximus the Confessor, no Eriugena, no Aquinas, no Cusanus, and no Ficino as we now know them. The pejorative label ‘pseudo-Dionysius’ belies his place in history, for there are no authentic writings by this disciple from which his lucubrations need to be distinguished: we do not speak of pseudo-Enoch, pseudo-Baruch, pseudo-Orpheus, or pseudo-Homer, and the present volume has therefore followed the practice of most contemporary specialists in dispensing with the prefix. The name of Dionysius is synonymous with a single body of literature, just as the name of Homer is synonymous with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. His text, like that of Homer, is protean, and, like Homer, he grows in stature with every new appropriation—all the more so the more the appropriation departs from what we now suppose to have been his ‘intent’. And just as it would have been slighting to call him pseudo-Dionysius, so it would have been needlessly pedantic to call this a volume on the reception of his writings: it is indeed so, for the most part, but this is surely a case in which the reception is the man.

## NOTES

1. An account of this appears as *International Workshop. Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum: Ancient and Modern Readers* at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319099641> (accessed 10 November 2020). Cf. also D. Carabine and D. Pallis, ‘Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum: Ancient and Modern Readers’, *Sobornost* 38:2 (2016), 61–67.

2. See PG 4, 625D–629A for his account (Podolak 2015: 228–231), particularly at 629A, quoting Dionysius, *Ep. VII*. Some scholars have suggested that Apollophanes may have been a mask for a pagan philosopher who was contemporary with Dionysius or even from a more remote past. An Apollophanes is in fact named by Porphyry (cf. Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VI.19.8, in PG 20, 565A–568A; Oulton and Lawlor 1932: 58–59) as one of the Platonists read by Origen. Rist 1992: 160–161 suggests that the Dionysian Apollophanes may be an allusion to Porphyry himself. For the Byzantine authors and the lexicographical work mentioned in this note and those that follow, see Kazhdan et al. 1991: 1355 (Methodius I); 1369–1370 (Michael Syncellus); 1930–1931 (*Suda*); 1983–1984 (Symeon Metaphrastes).
3. PG 4, 625D–628A and 633A–B (Podolak 2015: 228–229 and 233); for a different account, see Symeon Metaphrastes at PG 4, 589B–593C (cf. also PG 115, 1032C–1036C).
4. See Symeon Metaphrastes at PG 4, 593D–596A (cf. also PG 115, 1036D–1037A); Michael Syncellus at PG 4, 656D–657A (Podolak 2015: 248). There is a difference between these two accounts in that Michael Syncellus located the martyrdom of Dionysius during the reign of Trajan and not that of Domitian.
5. See the work attributed to Methodius I, patriarch of Constantinople, *Martyrdom of St Dionysius* at PG 4, 680B–681A (Podolak 2017: 317–318). At 680B 15–16 he says that the miracle ἐβλέπετο ἐκείνοις τοῖς δυνάμενοις πίστει ὁρᾶν. The critical edition of this hagiographical text adopts the present infinitive ὁρᾶν instead of δρᾶν [sic] which is found in Migne's edition. Cf. Symeon Metaphrastes at PG 4, 605A–C (cf. also PG 115, 1048A–C).
6. For the background of the identification between these two figures and later of these with the author of the corpus in Latin hagiography, see Lapidge 2017: 85–86 and 92.
7. According to the plausible conjecture of Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 106–107.
8. At PG 4, 612A–B (Adler 1967: 108).
9. Introduction to the surviving Greek of *On the Origin of Evil*, in Paparella 2004: 464–466.
10. Earlier scholars had suggested some connections between Dionysius and Proclus (and also with Plotinus), but they had not managed to demonstrate these. For this, see Engelhardt 1820 but also works that he published later and Montet 1848.
11. On early doubts as to the authenticity of the corpus, see Hausherr 1936; Rorem 1993: 15–17 and 41–42; Suchla, 'The Dionysian Corpus' in this volume.
12. See Inge 1899: 101–110, with Edwards, 'Three Theologians', in this volume. At p. 102, the philosophy of Hierotheus and Dionysius is described as 'Pan-Nihilism', and, at 104, as the 'ancient religion of the Brahmins'.
13. See Rolt 1920: 40 for the 'scriptural basis'—but by p. 41 we discover that Scripture is being read through the lens of Plotinus. Where modern readers often find Dionysius a reticent witness to his own experience, Rolt declares on p. 33 that he is 'unquestionably speaking of a psychological state to which he himself has been occasionally led'.
14. It is true that there were already a few theologians and scholars from the above tradition who elaborated on elements of Christian theology deriving from every work and the letters of Dionysius, but they had not demonstrated firstly the structural coherence of the Dionysian corpus as the basis of their perspectives on it as a theological synthesis.
15. See Edwards 2020.
16. See Louth 1981: 59 and 170–171.
17. Roques 1970: vi–vi estimates that there are fifteen translations of the corpus made into Latin from the ninth through to the seventeenth century.
18. See the essay on Dionysius and the later Neoplatonists in this volume by Edwards and Dillon. There have been various efforts to define his identity, particularly in the twentieth

- century. For a table of older hypotheses and some relevant bibliographies, see Hathaway 1969: 31–35; Roques 1957: cols. 250–257; Lilla 1982: 568–571. For a more recent hypothesis, see Perczel 2013.
19. Some of these theories are briefly canvassed by Ritter 1994: 22–23. There are also some more recent perspectives on the relation between Platonism and Christianity in the corpus. One of these is that its author was a pagan philosopher who converted Christian teachings to a form of philosophical system because of the persecutions by the Byzantine authorities and in this manner he attempted to promote it to the Christians (Mazzucchi 2006). Another account of this theory is that he turned philosophical knowledge to a different form in order to protect it and when it would be possible himself or his epigones to present explicitly what he had composed in an esoteric manner (Lankila 2011). It has been suggested also that Dionysius as a Christian author employed this knowledge as a kind of polemic to deconstruct the polytheistic metaphysical beliefs of the pagan philosophers of his time from the authoritative standpoint of his assumed apostolic identity (Mainoldi 2017). A final view may be that he made use of Platonism as a contextual language to develop a Christian theology focusing on themes that were not a matter of debate between the Christian groups of that period and thus he contributed to the development of alternative trends in Byzantine theology or, at least, his work may be read as such if judged by specific aspects of its later Christian reception (Pallis 2018/2019).
  20. See now Vinzent 2019: 278–365.
  21. On this attitude in the ancient context, see Nikephoros Kallistos (Xanthopoulos), *Historia ecclesiastica*, II.20 at PG 4, 616A–B (cf. also PG 145, 809A–B), arguing that no man has ever seen the additional works of Dionysius mentioned by himself. For an assessment of specific modern theories on this matter, see Stang 2012: 25–26 and 37–38. For a recent perspective based on a case study, see Pallis forthcoming.
  22. See Wickham 1983: 62–64.
  23. See now Gilliam 2017. The argument that the long recension of Ignatius draws on the *Apostolic Constitutions* was challenged by Hannah 1960.
  24. A canon which admits them to the New Testament, thereby making it a witness to its own canon, is reproduced by Westcott 1875: 550–551. The *Constitutions* were declared, however, to have been contaminated by the Council in Trullo. On this, see Lauchert 1896: 101.
  25. Dated to 1318 by Westcott 1875: 538–541.
  26. See further Vessey 1996.
  27. See Theodore Balsamon et al., PG 137, 213A–217A (Rhalles and Potles 1852: 110–112).

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SECTION I

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THE CORPUS IN  
ITS HISTORICAL  
SETTING

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## CHAPTER 2

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# THE DIONYSIAN CORPUS

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BEATE REGINA SUCHLA

THE so-called *Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum* is, first of all, a collection of four philosophical-theological treatises, namely, the texts *De divinis nominibus* (*De div. nom.*), *De caelesti hierarchia* (*De cael. hier.*), *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* (*De eccl. hier.*), and *De mystica theologia* (*De myst. theol.*)—and ten letters (*Epistulae* 1–10). These texts were originally written in Greek and come from an author whom the manuscripts of the corpus call Dionysius Areopagita, bishop of Athens. Their style and content are uniform and self-contained, confirming the homogeneity of the collection (which is thus seen as a *corpus*). The hypothesis, revived by Brons<sup>1</sup>, that *De div. nom.*, *De eccl. hier.*, and *epistulae* 6–10 contain later interpolations has been refuted by the Göttingen *Editio critica maior* of these writings<sup>2</sup>.

## A SELF-CONTAINED COLLECTION OF TREATISES AND LETTERS

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There are several peculiarities of the formation of the corpus<sup>3</sup>: On the one hand, it has already occurred in an early Syriac translation of the treatises and letters, which was produced by Sergius of Reshaina (i.e. Theodosiopolis), who died in 536. The formation of the corpus was thus completed in or before the year 536, which puts it unusually close to the time of the writing of these treatises and letters<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, it is a characteristic of all branches of the tradition, from the Greek original and the Syriac tradition, which is very close to it, to the later translations into Armenian, Georgian, Church-Slavonic, and Latin. And finally, it has remained untouched throughout the course of tradition. Contrast this with the formation of the corpus of the works of Athanasius, which was reworked several times<sup>5</sup>.

The order of the treatises and letters within the corpus shows remarkable consistency as well. Out of 120 possibilities to order the five works (I count the letters as only one work here; for  $n$  elements, there are  $n! = 1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3 \cdot \dots \cdot n$  possible orderings (permutations);

for five works, this gives  $5! = 1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 4 \cdot 5 = 120$  possibilities<sup>6</sup>), only three orderings appear in the Greek manuscripts:

*De cael. hier.* – *De eccl. hier.* – *De div. nom.* – *De myst. theol.* – *epistulae 1–10*

*De cael. hier.* – *De div. nom.* – *De eccl. hier.* – *De myst. theol.* – *epistulae 1–10*

*De div. nom.* – *De cael. hier.* – *De eccl. hier.* – *De myst. theol.* – *epistulae 1–10*

Thus, *De eccl. hier.* always follows *De cael. hier.*, while *De myst. theol.* is always the penultimate text, and *epistulae 1–10* is always the last one. Considering such consistency, the works cannot have been ordered at random.

## Intention and Meaning of the Formation of the *Corpus*

Structurally, the Dionysian writings of the corpus consist of four dialogues (*De div. nom.*, *De cael. hier.*, *De eccl. hier.*, and *De myst. theol.*) and ten letters. These two genres—dialogue and letter—were among the most popular literary genres in antiquity and late antiquity<sup>7</sup>. For instance, the authors of the Gospels frequently employed the letter genre and followed its form insofar as they included a sender and an addressee as well as a salutation or introductory form and a valediction or form of ending. For example, the Pauline pastoral letters begin with an address and salutation and end admonition and regards respectively regards and benediction.

However, when Dionysius chose the literary genre letter—which he names in the ninth letter<sup>8</sup>—he did not follow the example of the letters of the New Testament. For while all of his letters bear an addressee, they lack the extensive forms of salutation and ending of the letters of the New Testament. The tenth letter is an exception to this, as it begins with ‘Beloved and blessed soul, I salute you ...’. Instead, his main examples appear to have been the philosophical teaching letters of antiquity and late antiquity, as they were written by Epicurus, Seneca, or Iamblichus. Seneca’s letters, for instance, end with the form *vale*, but apart from this, they treat ethical problems and questions without extensive salutations or valedictions.

Dionysius himself called his writings *De div. nom.*, *De cael. hier.*, *De eccl. hier.*, and *De myst. theol.* neither dialogue nor letter, but literary work or treatise<sup>9</sup>, and he apparently considered them treatises in dialogue form.

That these four treatises and ten letters were united into a corpus is not unusual: tetralogies with appended letters were common in antiquity and late antiquity. However, considering that the prologue by John of Scythopolis emphasizes Dionysius’ effort to mediate between Greek-Platonic and Christian thinking<sup>10</sup>, two outstanding works might have served as primary examples: the *Corpus Platonicum* on the one hand and the New Testament with its gospels on the other. Namely, the *Corpus Platonicum* consisted of nine tetralogies, with thirteen of Plato’s letters enclosed. The New Testament with the

gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John also shows the form of a tetralogy, and it has been called a quadriform very early<sup>11</sup>; it also has appended letters.

Thus, the arrangement as a tetralogy with added letters—so to speak a self-contained, quadriform *Summa philosophiae et simul theologiae perennis*<sup>12</sup>—has programmatical reason. It serves to convey a formal proximity to the *Corpus Platonium* on the one hand and to the New Testament on the other, supporting the programme typical to the author Dionysius: to establish a connection between Greek-Platonic and Christian thinking<sup>13</sup>.

Ritter suggests<sup>14</sup> that the composition of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* out of fourteen parts (namely, the four treatises and ten letters of Dionysius) formally imitates the *Corpus Paulinum*, which—in the Syriac canon of the Bible—consists of fourteen letters. Since Dionysius considered his four treatises explicitly not as letters, but as treatises in dialogue form, I cannot share this opinion.

## A Critical Edition of the *Corpus* in the Circles of John of Scythopolis

The *corpus* has very early been expanded by a prologue preceding the treatises and letters of Dionysius and detailed marginal scholia, which accompany the Dionysian writings in the form of a *catena*<sup>15</sup>. We learn about the author of this prologue and these scholia from Phocas bar Sergius of Edessa, who, before the year 708 (Rorem and Lamoreaux date it to 708<sup>16</sup>), produced a further translation of the Dionysian treatises and letters into Syriac and prefixed it with three prologues, one of which he attributed to himself, one to John of Scythopolis, and one to George of Constantinople<sup>17</sup>. In his own prologue, Phocas accounts for his translation work, and amongst other things, he writes that a Greek text with the works of Dionysius Areopagita had fallen into his hands, that these works had been accompanied by Greek scholia of John of Scythopolis, and that he has translated both the works of Dionysius and the corresponding scholia of John of Scythopolis into Syriac<sup>18</sup>.

It is remarkable that not only are there several Greek manuscripts confirming the *corpus* form of the Syriac Phocas tradition, but that *every* undamaged Greek manuscript containing the entire works of Dionysius also contains, as an introduction, the prologue that Phocas attributes to John of Scythopolis<sup>19</sup>. This, in turn, means that the Greek tradition of the writings of Dionysius began at the same time as the tradition of John of Scythopolis' prologue and scholia, namely in the form of a joint *in-corpore* tradition<sup>20</sup>.

It is also remarkable that the critical edition of John of Scythopolis contains three anonymous scholia, which are placed as a continuous text preceding the treatises of Dionysius: the *scholion de philosophis paganis et de authentia operum Dionysii*, the *scholion de operibus deperditis*, and the *scholion de quibusdam vocibus a Dionysio usurpatis*<sup>21</sup>.



Furthermore, the entire tradition—both the Greek and the Syriac—witnesses, from the beginning, authentic readings together with corresponding interlinear or marginal variants, so it must be based on one common exemplar, which was a *codex variorum*, i.e. a manuscript already containing variant readings<sup>22</sup>.

Taking into account all these features of the Greek tradition, one has to conclude that it stems back to an early critical edition: the editor must have had access to several manuscripts of the works of Dionysius, which he compared to each other. He then included the variant readings, some interlinearly, some marginally, into his critical edition, thus creating an *editio variorum*, so to say a double *hyparchetypus*<sup>23</sup>. Finally, he added the prologue and the scholia of John of Scythopolis to his critical edition<sup>24</sup>. However, as neither the prologue nor the scholia show variant readings, they appear to have been created during the editing process, which means that the critical edition must have been produced in the circles of John of Scythopolis! This edition, on which Phocas bar Sergius of Edessa based his Syriac translation, can be dated to the time between 536 and 543/553<sup>25</sup>.

The endeavour to preserve the works of a Christian author and keep them together in a critically edited corpus is not exclusive to the Dionysian writings. For instance, the writings of Athanasius of Alexandria have been edited several times. However, it is unusual that the edition of John of Scythopolis remained untouched through centuries of rich tradition, only having additional scholia added to it<sup>26</sup>.

## Later Additions

About a hundred years after this edition, Maximus the Confessor took an interest in the works of Dionysius<sup>27</sup>. Since a copy of the edition of John of Scythopolis was available to him, he was able to add his own marginal notes to it. This is witnessed by Anastasius Bibliothecarius, who lived in the ninth century, and who found in Constantinople one of numerous reproductions that preserved the distinction between the scholia of John of Scythopolis and those of Maximus the Confessor by name. Thus, Anastasius could write to Charles the Bald:

Now those of the scholia and additions, that bear the sign of the life-giving cross at their bottom, stem, as they say, from the blessed Maximus, the Confessor and monk, while the others are, as they say, from the holy John, the bishop of Scythopolis.

In the course of tradition, further scholia were added, which can be verified through their content<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, the scholion *In de div. nom.* 308, 22–23 notes itself to be a later addition<sup>29</sup>.

The corpus, in its extended form, was copied countless times, first on parchment, later on paper, and was thus widely circulated. In the end, through randomly selected manuscripts and in corrupted form, it found its way into the *editio princeps*, and from there, through several intermediate steps, into the edition of Migne<sup>30</sup>.

## THE AUTHOR OF THE TREATISES AND LETTERS

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The incorporated four treatises and ten letters can be dated by their content from the turn of the fifth century to the sixth century<sup>31</sup>. Thus, the person named in the manuscripts of the corpus as Dionysius Areopagita, bishop of Athens can be ruled out as the author. He fills instead the role of the protagonist of the writings: methodically, one has to distinguish between the implicit author, i.e. the literary character speaking and acting in the texts, and the explicit author, i.e. the historical figure who actually wrote the texts.

The idea of implicit authorship plays an important role in the exegesis of the New Testament<sup>32</sup>. In the present case, to speak of a pseudonym or even a forgery<sup>33</sup>, fails to recognize both the intention of the true author and his programme.

### The Historic Dionysius Areopagita

The implicit author and protagonist of the Dionysian writings introduces himself as *Dionysius (epistula 7<sup>34</sup>)*:

Apollophanes ... told me ...: 'All of this, my dearest Dionysius, portends a change in the divine sphere.'

He also clarifies which Dionysius this is about, namely, the Areopagite mentioned in the *Acts*, converted by the Apostle Paul at the Areopagite council in Athens<sup>35</sup>.

The literary character thus assumes the role of the historic Dionysius Areopagita, about whom nothing else is known. However, the literary character embellishes his role: he, Dionysius, moved in the circle of the Apostles and observed in Heliopolis the eclipse occurring at the death of Jesus Christ<sup>36</sup>; furthermore, he met Paul, James, and Peter 'for a vision of that mortal body, that source of life, which bore God'<sup>37</sup>. He mentions the Apostle Paul seven times by name, lauds him as a paragon, and frequently cites or references his letters—more often than the Gospels or the *Acts*<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, he tells the reader that he is in contact with a Timothy<sup>39</sup>, thus raising associations to the Timothy that, according to Acts 16, 1–3, Paul chose as his companion<sup>40</sup>.

### The Unknown True Author and His Programme

This Timothy, to whom Paul later entrusted the parish of Ephesus and to whom he wrote two pastoral letters, was the son of a Jewish mother converted to Christianity and a Greek father, and thus an embodiment of the programme Paul had proclaimed in his speech

before the Areopagite council—to connect Greek thinking with Christian beliefs. This programme had converted Dionysius the Areopagite, which is to say, it had convinced him—and thus he supported it as the implicit author of these writings<sup>41</sup>. Implicit apostolic authorship and the programme of these works are thus closely intertwined, which also shows the intention the true author pursued with these writings: a peaceful reconciliation between the natural theology of the Greeks and the philosophical theology of the Christians, which were never that far apart to begin with<sup>42</sup>.

This reconciliation succeeded through a draft of a Platonic concept of a Christian world, laid out in the treatises and letters<sup>43</sup>, in which some positions of Neoplatonism are adapted to and transformed into Christian thinking, which led to accusations of parricide against the author, as he says himself in his seventh letter<sup>44</sup>:

But you say that the sophist Apollophanes reviles me, that he is calling me a *parricide*, that he charges me with making unholy use of things Greek to attack the Greeks.

This insult is understandable from the context of the Dionysian works: For the Athenian Neoplatonism was traditionally anti-Christian up until 529, the year of the closure of the Platonic Academy at Athens. Thus, the attempt to adapt and transform Greek thinking to and into Christian thinking can certainly be called courageous. The purpose of those four treatises and ten letters of Dionysius was therefore a Pauline subsumption of Greek thinking under Christian beliefs<sup>45</sup>.

Dionysius Areopagita is a literary character with the mission to act as an implicit apostolic author, and as such to communicate the author's programme, since an orthodox author from the Apostolic era has always had the highest authority within Christianity. In the case of these writings, this was more and more effective as the true author could step back further and further behind his implicit author, at which he succeeded so excellently that he vanished into historical obscurity soon after the first circulation of the treatises and letters<sup>46</sup>. For the authentic name, identity, biographical data, lifetime, lifework etc. of the true author are completely lost to history: 'To put it frankly, nobody knows who the author ... was' (Schäfer 2006: 11). Nonetheless, a text-immanent dating *post quem* is possible for these works. Firstly, there are references to the creed established in the Syriac-Antiochene liturgy in 476 by Peter the Fuller (Petrus Fullo)<sup>47</sup>, and to the rite of the myron-sacrament also introduced by Peter the Fuller<sup>48</sup>. Secondly, the Christology of the Dionysian writings is close to the *henoticon* decreed in 482, a mediation between the defenders and opponents of the Council of Chalcedon<sup>49</sup>; and thirdly, they depend on the writings of the Neoplatonist Proclus (d. 485)<sup>50</sup>.

A *terminus ante quem* can also be established, text-emanently (out of the text): The writings were first mentioned around 518/528 in some texts of Severus of Antioch<sup>51</sup>. Thus, the true author must have written the four treatises and ten letters between 482/485 and 518/528<sup>52</sup>.

Simultaneously, the dating implies the region of origin<sup>53</sup>: the domain of the Antiochene rite. The Hellenized Antioch (at the River Orontes, nowadays Antakya,

Antakije) was the capital of Syria, where Christianity had already gained a foothold in the Apostolic era. In the fourth and fifth centuries AD, Antioch developed into a patriarchate. There, the so-called West Syriac liturgy (with the Greek-Antiochene and the Syriac-Antiochene rite) was celebrated, in the cities in Greek, in the countryside in Syriac language. The same holds for the patriarchate of Jerusalem, which did not adopt the Byzantine rite until the tenth century.

This bilinguality in the patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem might also explain both the inelegant, yet powerful, obscure Greek language rich in *hapax legomena* appearing in the treatises and letters, and the early translation into Syriac, produced before 536. Its author, the above-mentioned Sergius of Reshaina, had good contacts with Ephraemius, patriarch of Antioch. Therefore, the true author cannot be found in Constantinople (as frequently assumed)<sup>54</sup>, but between Antioch and Jerusalem.

In his affiliation to the Antiochene rite and the implied proximity to the patriarchate of Antioch, we find another explanation why the true author chose Paul as his paragon: Antioch was the first gentile Christian parish; from here, Paul and Barnabas were sent on their apostolic missions among the gentiles. Paul, who had first heard the call to Christianity in the near Syriac Damascus, felt chosen for the conversion of the gentiles and embarked from nearby Caesarea (Maritima resp. Palaestinae) to Rome.

Yet, beyond this general localization, it is possible to determine the area of the author's activity even more precisely<sup>55</sup>:

His quotations, references, and allusions point us towards the school of Caesarea (Palaestinae), which belonged to the patriarchate of Jerusalem, where, as mentioned earlier, the Antiochene rite was practised as well. The school of Caesarea had been founded by Origen (185–253/254), who was forced to flee from Alexandria in 230/231 after coming into conflict with the local bishop, and went to Caesarea where he stayed and worked for the rest of his life. Until his flight, Origen had belonged to the Alexandrian school, among whose members were Philo, Clement of Alexandria, and especially the Platonist Plotinus. Both Clement and Origen were close to the Hellenistic Judaism on one hand and to Platonism on the other; furthermore, Origen emphasized the Alexandrian allegorical–anagogical exegesis of Scripture.

Strikingly, many references to Philo of Alexandria can be found in the Dionysian writings. Since the tradition of Philo can likely be traced back to the library of Caesarea, these references also point to Caesarea. Moreover, the treatises and letters contain numerous quotations from and references and allusions to Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Plotin. These require a library well stocked with Alexandrian works, as it could be found in Caesarea.

Furthermore, the abundance of further quotations, references, and allusions to a most diverse set of authors proves that this library was very well stocked in general, something that could also be said of the library of Caesarea, for the library established by Origen had been expanded significantly by Pamphilus (*d.* after 307) and was known as one of the richest in antiquity. Eusebius used it extensively. It was only destroyed in the Arab invasion in 638.

The proximity to Caesarea also explains why the true author supports the allegorical-anagogical method in the treatise *De cael. hier.* And last but not least, the proximity to Caesarea implies proximity to Scythopolis, the metropolis of the old province Palaestina Secunda, situated just a few kilometres from Caesarea, the metropolis of the old province Palaestina Prima.

## Hypotheses About the Author

As soon as the treatises and letters came into circulation, the question of the true author was raised, and soon the name Apollinaris of Laodicea was mentioned<sup>56</sup>. Since then, there have been countless attempts to identify the author with a known historical person. In 1969, Hathaway counted a total of twenty-two hypotheses<sup>57</sup>, where people like Severus of Antioch (Stiglmayr), Peter the Iberian (Honigmann), Petrus Fullo (Riedinger), or the Neoplatonist Damascius (Hathaway) were brought into play. Since then, none of these hypotheses could be confirmed, and the search continues. Thus, old hypotheses like those of Honigmann (Van Esbroeck 1993) and Hathaway (Mazzucchi 2006, 2013, 2017) are investigated again, new approaches are sought (Kocijančič 2011) and new theories are proposed, like the one claiming that the true author was a disciple of the Origenist Evagrius Ponticus (Perczel 1999).

There are also scholars believing the aforementioned Sergius of Reshaina to be the author<sup>58</sup>. This theory, however, is disproved on the one hand by the bad quality of the Syriac text itself, which both lexically and syntactically shows that it is the result of a cumbersome and not always successful struggle for the understanding of an obscure Greek original rich in *hapax legomena*; and on the other hand by the (also aforementioned) Phocas, who notes in his prologue to the translation that there has long been a translation of the writings of Dionysius Areopagita into Syriac, namely by the translator Sergius, whose translation, however, is uneven and imprecise, which is why he, Phocas, is undertaking a new attempt at translation<sup>59</sup>. These two facts—a bad Syriac that does not do justice to the Greek original and the testimony of Phocas—make it impossible that Sergius was the author of the treatises and letters.

Von Balthasar supposes that the author was close to the previously mentioned Sergius of Reshaina and John of Scythopolis<sup>60</sup>. His theory is supported by the editorial work of John of Scythopolis. However, the fact that John made essential modifications to the Dionysian philosophy and theology excludes him as an author.

One has to conclude that so far, all attempts—even though some of them are highly erudite—are lacking irrefutable cogency and confirmation, usually for historical or chronological reasons or with regard to content. The true author, withdrawing into obscurity behind his implicit author, remains intangible. Ritter's remark that 'until the appearance of—yet undiscovered—*compelling* evidence', all further theorizing would 'only unnecessarily hold back' the research, still stands<sup>61</sup>.

## THE DISSEMINATION AND IMMEDIATE RECEPTION OF THE CORPUS

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Early on, the works of the corpus have been read<sup>62</sup>. And as early as in the sixth century, their author was considered an important theologian<sup>63</sup>. Pamphilus Theologus titles him 'divine' and 'ruler of the church of Athens', Leontius Scholasticus calls him a 'teacher' next to men such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Justin, and others, and Andrew of Caesarea praises him as a 'great' and 'blessed' man<sup>64</sup>.

At the centre of attention, one finds the angelology of Dionysius, which is referenced by John Philoponus, Gregory the Great, and John of Damascus, and according to which they do not attribute a body (σώμα) to the angels, but consider them pure immaterial intelligences (νόες)<sup>65</sup>, furthermore Dionysius' reference to the eclipse at the crucifixion of the Lord, again taken up, for example, by John Philoponus<sup>66</sup>, the sacramentology of Dionysius, followed for instance by Jacob of Edessa<sup>67</sup>, or Dionysius' conception of the analogy, which was quoted in support by defenders of icons such as Germanus of Constantinople or John of Damascus<sup>68</sup>.

Most effective was, however, the reception of the Christology of the corpus, which is surprising insofar as firstly, one can concur with Theresia Hainthaler that the statements of the corpus were 'certainly not rooted in a christocentric spirituality'<sup>69</sup>, and secondly, it can be observed that the author of the corpus shows no interest in the Christological controversy of his time<sup>70</sup>. Accordingly, from a Christological point of view, 'the important (and controversial) formulae from the end of the fifth/beginning of the sixth century' are missing<sup>71</sup>. Thus, the discourse whether the standing of the Monophysites (We prefer the historical terms 'Monophysitism' and 'Monophysite' over the terms 'Miaphysitism' and 'Miaphysite') was truly strengthened by the Dionysian writings and their phraseology of a 'single theandric activity' in Christ<sup>72</sup> and 'Jesus' *form by God*<sup>73</sup> has so far remained fruitless.

### The Reception by the Opponents of the Council of Chalcedon

The Monophysite Severus, who had been elected patriarch of Antioch in 512, nonetheless refers to Dionysius in three of his own works: in his polemic writings *Contra Additiones Iuliani* and *Adversus apologiam Iuliani*, which were written around 518/528, he quotes from the second chapter of *De div. nom.*, and in his *Epistula III ad Ioannem Higumentum* he invokes *epistula* 4 of Dionysius for the defence of his *mia physis* formula<sup>74</sup>.

Shortly after, i.e. 532/533 at the Synod of Constantinople, where Chalcedonians and Monophysites met at Emperor Justinian's instigation, followers of Severus refer to

Dionysius as a proponent of the doctrine of the one divine–human nature of the Word and quote a passage from the first chapter of *De div. nom.* in support<sup>75</sup>.

## The Reception by the Defenders of the Council of Chalcedon

At the same synod, the authenticity of this proof is rejected by Hypatius, the orthodox metropolitan of Ephesus, who had become a trusted confidant of Emperor Justinian in the years 531 to 536. However, he doubts neither the authorship nor the apostolicity of the writings, but instead calls the Dionysian ‘proofs’ quoted by the Severians a distortion of the works of the ‘beatus Dionysius’<sup>76</sup>. Again shortly after, at a synod against the Severian Anthimus that happened in Constantinople from 2 May to 4 June 536, he instigates the excommunication of Severus of Antioch himself.

When Chalcedonians and Monophysites opposed each other irreconcilably even after the synod, the Dionysian writings were on dangerous ground as they were claimed by the Severians in support of their positions, especially since with the aforementioned Sergius of Reshaina it had been a Monophysite of all people who produced the first translation of the corpus into Syriac<sup>77</sup>. Even worse, an allegation appeared that was far more dangerous than the purported proximity to Monophysitism—the accusation of dependence on pagan philosophy of the Athenian school, especially that of Proclus.

## The Defence of the Corpus

In a time where the relapse of a Christian into pagan beliefs or ideology was punishable by death<sup>78</sup>, these allegations were so severe that one author felt compelled to make a quick and polemic–apologetic statement. It may have been John Philoponus, who was a resolute opponent of Proclus, as can be seen from his writing *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*<sup>79</sup>.

In his statement, which bears the title *scholion de philosophis paganis et de authentia operum Dionysii*, he defends the Dionysian works with the traditional reference to priority and the topos of plagiarism and a reference to the parallel between the relationships Proclus–Dionysius and Plato–Moses<sup>80</sup>:

One must know that some philosophers outside [i.e. non-Christian ones], and especially Proclus, have frequently employed the observations of the blessed Dionysius, even in their dry manner of speaking. One can therefore become suspicious that the older Athenian philosophers have taken his [i.e. Dionysius’] writings and—as he mentions in the present book—hidden them, so they would be seen as the fathers of his magnificent words themselves. By an act of God, the present oeuvre [i.e. of Dionysius] has now resurfaced to convict their vain thirst for glory and their malice. That they are used to appropriating what is ours is shown by the great Basil



on occasion of his commentary of *In principio erat verbum*, by saying about their manner of speaking: 'I know that many of those who are exceptionally clever without regard for the truth, only for the purpose of earthly wisdom, have on the one hand admired what is ours, and on the other hand presumed to incorporate it into their own works. For the devil is a thief, and he divulges what is ours to those that speak for him', So he says.

When the Pythagorean Numenius openly states 'For who is Plato, if not an Attic-speaking Moses', no one can deny this, as he [i.e. Numenius] is not one of us, but of our opponents; in the same manner, Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, confirms that not just today, but even before the arrival of Christ those outside of our wisdom were used to stealing what is ours.

While even a resolute defender of Chalcedonian Christology such as John of Scythopolis apparently hears no hint of Monophysitism in the works of Dionysius, he quickly and directly reacted to the allegation of dependence on Proclus. He included the apologetic statement of John Philoponus given above in his edition of the corpus, so it would always accompany the tradition of the works and enlighten the critics in this regard.

Thus, John Philoponus must have authored his small apologetic statement before or during the editorial work of John of Scythopolis or a circle of scholars around him, i.e. before or during the time between 536 and 543/553<sup>81</sup>. His monophysite and tritheist positions, of which the former was not condemned by the Church until 680 and the latter until 570, were probably not known to John of Scythopolis at the time of his editorial work.

This clever inclusion of the small apologetic statement, the two aforementioned texts on the conception of hierarchy and on the lost other works of Dionysius, the brilliant prologue by John of Scythopolis and his orthodox interpretation of the Dionysian works strengthened the assumption of their authenticity, which was no longer questioned in the East since the second half of the sixth century and supported their reception.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

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The assumed authenticity of the writings created the desire to have one's own copy in one's library. Thus, numerous manuscripts were produced, all of which—at least in the Greek tradition—can be traced back to the critical edition of John of Scythopolis.

### The Layout of the Critical Edition

Due to references that John of Scythopolis himself gives in his prologue and scholia, the layout of the critical edition can be reliably reconstructed<sup>82</sup>.

## The Transmission of the Greek and Syriac Tradition

The most important dates of the transmission can be laid out as follows<sup>83</sup>:

467/485–518/528	Archetypus
536 or earlier	Hyparchetypus Syrus (Sergii)
536–543/553	Hyparchetypus Graecus 1 (codex merus Ioannis Scythopolitani)
before June 653	Hyparchetypus Graecus 2 (codex mixtus Maximi Confessoris)
before 708	Codex Syrus (Phocae)
before 827	Codex Parisinus graecus 437

## The Manuscripts of the Greek Tradition

The number of Greek manuscripts remaining today that directly or indirectly witness the treatises and letters of Dionysius is very high, which impressively underscores their importance. We know of more than 540 Greek manuscripts from the ninth century through to the seventeenth; a volume comparable to that of Plato<sup>84</sup>. Today, the most important manuscripts lie at Athens, on Mount Athos, at Florence, Jerusalem, London, Moscow, Oxford, Paris, on Patmos, at Rome, on Mount Sinai, at Venice, and at Vienna<sup>85</sup>. Some of the oldest among them are the well-known manuscript *Parisinus graecus* 437 from before 827 and the manuscript *Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Conventi Soppressi, Codex 202*, from before 886<sup>86</sup>.

## THE ENIGMA ABOUT THE OEUVRE OF DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITA

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It is not known yet whether the formation of the corpus pushed other writings of Dionysius so far aside that they were lost or forgotten.

## Further writings of Dionysius Areopagita Mentioned in the Corpus

The treatises and letters frequently refer to other works that their author had written or intended to write. Named are<sup>87</sup>:

Αἱ θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις (*The Theological Representations*)<sup>88</sup>

Ἡ συμβολικὴ θεολογία (*The Symbolic Theology*)<sup>89</sup>

Περὶ ψυχῆς (*The Soul*)<sup>90</sup>

Περὶ δικαίου καὶ θείου δικαιωτηρίου (*Concerning Justice and the Judgement*)<sup>91</sup>

Περὶ νοητῶν τε καὶ αἰσθητῶν (*The Conceptual and the Perceptible*)<sup>92</sup>

Περὶ τῶν θείων ὕμνων (*Divine Hymns*)<sup>93</sup>

Περὶ τῶν ἀγγελικῶν ιδιοτήτων καὶ τάξεων (*The Properties and Ranks of the Angels*)<sup>94</sup>

None of these works has ever been found<sup>95</sup>. It is therefore unknown whether these works were only mentioned as a stylistic device or whether they actually existed but were pushed aside by the edition of John of Scythopolis and quickly became lost to history. Either way, the abovementioned *scholion de operibus deperditis* testifies that these works were nowhere to be found, even early on.

## Other Works Circulating under the Name of Dionysius Areopagita

There are manuscripts that pass on works under the name Dionysius or Dionysius Areopagita beyond the writings contained in the corpus. Above all, these are the following works, of which especially the *Epistula de morte apostolorum Petri et Pauli* (CPG 6631) has been of great historical importance<sup>96</sup>:

*Confessio fidei*<sup>97</sup>

*Epistula 11 ad Apollophanem philosophum*<sup>98</sup>

*Epistula ad s. Timotheum de passione apostolorum Petri et Pauli*<sup>99</sup>

*Epistula ad Titum*<sup>100</sup>

*Epistula ad Titum*<sup>101</sup>

*Orationis dominicae expositio* (διάλυσις τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν)<sup>102</sup>

*Hymnus* Ω πάντων ἐπέκεινα<sup>103</sup>

*Narratio de vita sua*<sup>104</sup>

*Tractatus astronomicus et meteorologicus*<sup>105</sup>

## Research on these Circulating Texts

Not all of these works are authentic. While the letter to a philosopher named Apollophanes was written by Hilduin of Saint-Denis and the creed, the other letter to Titus, the *Narratio de vita sua* and the *Tractatus astronomicus et meteorologicus* must be considered later, spurious writings, the other works and the fragment can be authentic. Maybe they were excluded from the edition of John of Scythopolis because the included four treatises and ten letters constituted a *Summa philosophiae et simul theologiae perennis* and were to be presented to the reader as such<sup>106</sup>. These gaps in research are yet to be filled.

## NOTES

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1. Brons 1975.
2. Suchla 1990; Heil 1991, <sup>2</sup>2012; Ritter 1991, <sup>2</sup>2012.
3. Suchla 1985: 179 ff.
4. For the dating see the section entitled 'The Historic Dionysius Areopagita'.
5. Suchla 1985: 182.
6. Suchla 1985:183.
7. Suchla 2008: 58–59.
8. Epistula 9, 1113 B, Ritter 2012: 207, 2: 'if I finish my letter now'; see also epistula 7, 1081 C, Ritter 2012: 170, 5: 'what we discuss in a letter'.
9. De div. nom. 593 B, Suchla 1990: 116, 5: λόγος.
10. See also the contribution by Suchla, John of Scythopolis in this volume.
11. For instance by Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses* III, 11, 8: quadriforme; τετράμορφον.
12. Suchla 2008: 55; 61.
13. Suchla 2008: 18–20.
14. Ritter 1994: 24 and 52.
15. Suchla 1984; Suchla 1989; Suchla 1985: Tables 3, 7, 11, 19.
16. Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 37.
17. Sherwood 1952: 174–184; Suchla 1980: 36; Suchla 1985: 181; 183; Van Esbroeck 1997: 167.
18. Suchla 1980: 36.
19. Suchla 1984: 180–181; Suchla 1985: 184.
20. Suchla 1985: 184.
21. For the scholion de philosophis paganis et de authentia operum Dionysii see also the contribution by Suchla, John of Scythopolis in this volume.
22. Suchla 1985: 185–187.
23. Suchla 1985: 185–187.
24. Suchla 1985: 188.
25. Suchla 2008: 16; 45 et al.; see also the contribution by Suchla, John of Scythopolis in this volume.
26. Suchla 2008: 53.
27. Suchla 2008, 64–65.
28. Suchla 2008: 65–66.
29. Suchla 2011: 311, apparatus criticus.
30. PG III and PG IV; Suchla 1990:3–35.
31. For the precise dating, see the next section.
32. See, for instance, Söding 1998: 47, 107, 147, 238.
33. Mazzucchi 2017: 289 et al.
34. Ritter 2012: 170, 4.
35. De div. nom. 649 D–652 A, Suchla 1990:136,18–137,7 et al.; Acts 17,33–34; see also PG IV: Prologus 16,18–22; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998:144; Suchla 2011, 98, 6–9.
36. Epistula 7, Ritter 2012:169, 1–3.
37. De div. nom. III, Luiheid C. and Rorem P. 1987: 70; Suchla 1990:141, 5–8.
38. Suchla 2008: 18.
39. De div. nom. I, Suchla 1990:121,14; De myst. theol. I, Ritter 2012: 142, 5; epistula 9, Ritter 2012: 193, 3.
40. Suchla 2008: 19.
41. Suchla 2008: 19.

42. Suchla 2008: 19–20.
43. Suchla 1995 *passim*; Suchla 2008: 24.
44. Epistula 7, Ritter 2012: 166, 7–9; Luibheid and Rorem 1987: 267.
45. Suchla 2008: 24; similarly and earlier Ritter 1994: 51–52.
46. Suchla 2008: 18.
47. De eccl. hier. III 7; Heil 2012: 87, 24–88, 1.
48. De cael. hier. XV 16; De eccl. hier. II 7; II Theoria 8; IV; V 1; V 3; V 5; VII Theoria 9; Heil 2012: 72, 14–17; 73, 5; 78, 14; 95, 4; 95, 8–103, 18; 104, 3; 106, 19; 107, 25; 108, 2; 130, 2.
49. Ritter 1994: 51.
50. Koch 1895; Siglmayr 1895.
51. Epistula III ad Ioannem Higumenum; Adversus apologiam Iuliani; Contra Additiones.
52. Suchla 2008: 21.
53. Suchla 2008: 21–22.
54. See for instance Ritter 1994: 9.
55. Suchla 2008, 22–24.
56. PG IV 85 C.
57. Hathaway 1969: 31–35.
58. For instance Arthur 2008: 197, who writes: ‘Sergius of Reshaina, whom I believe to have been the author of the Dionysian corpus.’
59. Suchla 1980: 35–36.
60. Von Balthasar 1961: 670.
61. Ritter 1994: 9; italics in the original.
62. Rorem and Lamoreaux: ‘it was being used by just about all parties in the Christian east’ [1998: 11].
63. Suchla 2008: 71–72.
64. Hainthaler 1997: 290.
65. See for instance John Philoponus, De opificio mundi 1, 9–16; Scholten 23, 1: 108–149.
66. De opificio mundi 2, 21 and 3, 9 referencing epistula 7; Ritter 2012: 165–170; Scholten 23, 1: 256–257; 23, 2: 312–313.
67. Brock 1979: 20–36.
68. For instance, John of Damascus quotes Dionysius in the anthology to his Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres; Kotter 1975: 144, III 43, 4–5; I 28; II 24, 3–7; I 30; II 26, 2–8; 145, I 32; II 28; III 44, 2–8; I 33; II 29; III 45, 1–6.
69. Hainthaler 1997: 268.
70. Suchla 2008: 28–31.
71. Hainthaler 1997: 283.
72. Epistula 4, 1072 C; Ritter 2012: 161, 9.
73. theoplastía; De div. nom. 648 A; Suchla 1990: 133, 5–6.
74. Hainthaler 1997: 285.
75. I 4, Suchla 1990: 113, 6–12; Innocentii Episcopi Maroneae Epistula, 172, 2–8; Hainthaler 1997: 286; Makris 2000: 4–5.
76. Innocentii Episcopi Maroneae Epistula, 172, 2–8; 173, 12–18; Makris 2000: 4–7.
77. Suchla 2008: 67.
78. Suchla 1995: 10–11.
79. Suchla 1995: 12; Makris 2000: 8.
80. Suchla 1995: 19–20; Makris 2000: 9–10; Suchla 2008: 205.
81. Against Makris 2000: 10, who dates the commentary between 550 and 570.
82. See the contribution by Suchla, John of Scythopolis in this volume.
83. Suchla 1990: 63; Suchla 2011: 585.

84. Suchla 2008: 70.
85. Suchla 1990: 14–35; Suchla 2011: 22–37.
86. Suchla 1990: 31, Nr. 130; 17, Nr. 25; Suchla 2011: 23, Nr. 12.
87. Suchla 2008: 210.
88. See De div. nom. 585 B; 593 B; 636 C; 640 B; 645 A; 953 B; Suchla 1990: 107, 1; 116, 7; 122, 11; 125, 13 sq; 130, 15; 221, 11; De myst. theol. 1032 D; 1033 A; 1033 B; Ritter 2012: 146, 1; 146, 9; 147, 5.
89. See De div. nom. 597 B; 700 D; 913 B; 984 A; Suchla 1990: 121, 3; 149, 9; 211, 9; 231, 8; De cael. hier. 336 A; Heil 2012: 56, 1; De myst. theol. 1033 A; 1033 B; Ritter 2012: 146, 11; 147, 6–7; epistula 9, 1104 B; 1113 B; Ritter 2012: 193, 5; 207, 4.
90. See De div. nom. 696 C; Suchla 1990: 145, 17.
91. See De div. nom. 736 B; Suchla 1990: 179, 19.
92. See De eccl. hier. 373 B; 397 C; Heil 2012: 65, 18; 74, 8.
93. See De cael. hier. 212 B; Heil 2012: 31, 23.
94. See De div. nom. 696 B; Suchla 1990: 145, 2 sq.
95. Suchla 2008: 60.
96. Suchla 2008: 211–212.
97. CPG 6635; version: Arabic.
98. CPG 6630; version: Latin (inc. Iamiam ad te, cordis mei amor, sermonem dirigo); PG 3: 1119–1122; written by Hilduin of Saint-Denis; Peeters 1910: 310 sqq.; Lehmann 1961: 136; Canart 1971.
99. CPG 6631; versions: Greek, Latin (BHL 6671; inc. Saluto te divinum discipulum et filium), Syriac (BHO 968), Armenian (BHO 966–967), Georgian, Arabic (BHO 969), Ethiopian (BHO 970); the letter is quoted as early as in the seventh century; Pitra 1883: 241–254, 261–276; Lehmann 1961: 137; Van Esbroeck 1997: 181; Macé/Mühlenberg/Muthreich/Wulf 2021.
100. CPG 6632; version: Armenian (BHO 642); Vetter 1887; Koch 1898: 393–397; Van Esbroeck 1997: 181.
101. Version: Greek; fragment; Paramelle 1997.
102. Version: Greek; contained in some manuscripts of the Greek Dionysius tradition.
103. Version: Greek; contained in some manuscripts of the Greek Dionysius tradition; text and German translation: Beierwaltes 1998: 55–56; attributed to: Gregory Nazianzen (PG 37: 507–508; CPG 3034: spurium), Proclus (Beierwaltes 1998: 55, belongs rather to Proklus than to Dionysius Areopagita), Dionysius Areopagita (Sicherl 1988: 82, the hymn attributed to Gregory Nazianzen as carmen 1, 1, 29 belongs to Dionysius Areopagita; there is ‘basically nothing against it’).
104. CPG 6633; versions: Syriac (BHO 255. 3), Coptic-Sa’idic (BHO 255.2), Arabic, Georgian Armenian; Kugener 1907/ 2; Peeters 1910; Peeters 1912; Peeters 1921.
105. CPG 6634; version: Syriac; Kugener 1907; Peeters 1910: 313 sqq.
106. Suchla 2008: 60–61.

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### Abbreviations

BHL Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis.

BHO Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis.

CPG Clavis Patrum Graecorum.

PG Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# CONTENT OF THE DIONYSIAN CORPUS

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TIM RIGGS

WHEN it comes to the content of the Dionysian Corpus (hereafter *CD*), the primary controversy still revolves around the question as to whether the writings contained therein are Christian or Neoplatonic in character.<sup>1</sup> For quite some time, there were two main approaches to the question: either one argued that the corpus is a Neoplatonic work and therefore not a genuine Christian one; or that it is a genuine Christian work and its apparent Neoplatonism is only a veneer which contributes nothing to its substance. Some of the more recent scholarship on the *CD* has taken a different approach, instead arguing that it is equally Christian and Neoplatonic.<sup>2</sup> This latter approach does not regard the two characters as mutually exclusive and, in fact, seems to be the more fruitful approach to coming to an understanding of the *CD*, both as a whole and in respect to its individual components.

This essay adheres to this general approach of recognizing the simultaneous Christian and Neoplatonic characters of the *CD*. Whereas Stang recently has focused on the Christian aspect of the *CD* in his argument for taking seriously the author's assumption of the name of a disciple of St Paul, and whereas Perl has focused his attentions on the Neoplatonic aspect in his account of the *CD*'s relationship to the works of Plotinus and Proclus, this essay shows how the two aspects are fundamentally related in the treatises both as a whole and individually. The work will not be able to give an exhaustive account of this relationship; rather, it outlines in very broad strokes, how the author thinks Dionysius the Areopagite regarded the relationship of Neoplatonic philosophy to Christian revelation, and how this is evident in the way he uses the one to make the other philosophically intelligible.<sup>3</sup>

First of all, it is a plain fact that the *CD* is replete with references to, and quotations from, passages in Scripture.<sup>4</sup> These are not decoration, nor an attempt to give a Christian veneer to what would be, in truth, a pagan work; rather, they provide scriptural anchors for the Areopagite's arguments. They are more than support, in that Dionysius is in fact offering Neoplatonic arguments in order to illuminate and elaborate what he takes to

be the ultimate meaning of Holy Scripture.<sup>5</sup> In this way, he puts Neoplatonism at the service of Christian revelation. Neoplatonism fulfils this role as ‘handmaiden’, so to speak, throughout the entire corpus, providing a unitary and internally coherent interpretation of that revelation. In other words, the ‘hierarchies’, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, do not contradict either each other or the ‘more metaphysical’ works such as *On the Divine Names* or *The Mystical Theology*.<sup>6</sup> And, as the essay argues, what unites the treatises at their conceptual base is Dionysius’ employment in the service of scriptural interpretation of the remaining—proceeding—reverting cyclical structure of the Neoplatonic conception of causality, especially in its Proclean form.<sup>7</sup>

This employment of Proclean causality takes two forms, as is demonstrated in what follows.<sup>8</sup> First, Dionysius uses it to explain the general, essential generation of all things from out of the unity of God, so that the latter can be seen not only to transcend His creation but also to be immanent in it at all levels. This is the main thrust of the argument in *Divine Names* (hereafter DN). Second, he uses it to ground the cycle as it pertains to human beings specifically (and their intellectual paradigms, the angels) through an elaboration of the cognitive reversion or perfection of human beings which he describes in the *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (hereafter CH and EH, respectively). In those texts, it is clear that Jesus, as both the Son (as divine member of the Holy Trinity) and as Christ (in the Son’s incarnate form) is the central, animating figure. In those two texts, He is both prior to both hierarchies and present throughout them in the activity of every order; He is their leader and their cause, and all hierarchical activity is directed towards Him as towards the final end. Jesus is the remaining cause from which all hierarchical illumination proceeds and is that to which all hierarchical cognitive activity reverts. Whereas CH and EH describe the cognitive perfection of human beings in its intersubjective dimension, the *Mystical Theology* (hereafter MT) describes the individual dimension of cognitive perfection through a meditative process of intellectual purification which results in union with God in ‘the divine darkness’, through a progressively unifying reversion through the divine names and other symbols. Finally, both forms of the causal cycle—essential and cognitive—appear in the *Letters* (hereafter Ep.), which serve to complement the subjects of the four other treatises. I will begin with *On the Divine Names*, then proceed through the two ‘hierarchies’, and then finish with *The Mystical Theology* and *Letters*.<sup>9</sup>

## ON THE DIVINE NAMES

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In this treatise, Dionysius is primarily concerned to show, by way of an examination of the ‘divine names’ attributed to God in Scripture, the unfolding of reality from out of God’s unknowable essence. The Proclean causal cycle is especially evident in the content of the treatise’s chapters.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Dionysius repeats the cycle over and over again in a variety of contexts pertaining to each of the divine processions. And

although he prefers to refer the application of the divine names to the Godhead in its unity, he nevertheless places Jesus Christ in a special relationship to the processions: God becomes man in order to complete the creation of human beings through His 'love of man' (φιλανθρωπία).<sup>11</sup> It will suffice here to show how Dionysius establishes the cycle of remaining—proceeding—reverting as the foundation of his account of the divine names.

From the very beginning of the text, Dionysius dwells on the dynamics of the causal structure, but, significantly, he incorporates it into his statement of the purpose (*skopos*) of the text at DN 2.11 (135.10–137.13). He begins there by saying that he is going to unfold 'the common and unified names of the divine distinction', and that this 'divine distinction' (διάκρισις θεία) is the 'Good-befitting processions of the Thearchy' or, in other words, the processions (προόδους) from God, to which the common divine names refer.<sup>12</sup> Dionysius uses the processions of Being (136.1–7) and One (136.7–10) as examples to elaborate on the causal process, and in this example are compressed many of the main elements of Proclus' account of causality in his *Elements of Theology* (even if Dionysius uses a somewhat different terminology). In the example of the procession of Being we find the following elements:

1. That God, as cause, possesses the character communicated in procession in a way superior to the character's manifestation in the procession ('since God is Being super-essentially').<sup>13</sup>
2. That each procession, as cause of the beings which participate it, is multiplied by the production of those beings without itself being diminished. God, as 'that one Being', produces Himself in many forms (πολλαπλασιάζεσθαι) when producing beings. In doing so, He remains undiminished (ἀνελαττώτωρ), full (πλήρους), and transcendent (ἐξηρημένον) despite unfolding Himself in the rich variety of created beings.<sup>14</sup>

In the example of the procession of One, the following additional element can be seen:

3. That although God, as cause, both remains and proceeds in the production of beings, He always reverts those beings, or turns them back to Him and closes the causal loop, through the beings' similarity to Himself ('producing and perfecting and holding together every one and multitude').<sup>15</sup> Dionysius calls this reversion deification (ἡ θεώσις) and likeness to God (τὸ θεοειδέες).<sup>16</sup>

Thus, although the aim of the text is primarily to celebrate the divine names of God, yet it is to do so *within the context of the causal cycle of remaining—procession—reversion*.

The causal cycle plays a central role also in the chapter on the procession of the Good, the first and most universal procession and common divine name. The Good, or God's Goodness, is the creative, superabundant cause and origin of all things and the end towards which all things revert, while remaining uniquely transcendent over what it produces.<sup>17</sup> However, an important aspect of the cycle is introduced in this chapter,

which connects the content of the DN directly to both CH and EH. At DN.4.1–2 (144.6–145.17), Dionysius introduces the special case of causality with respect to intelligible and intellectual beings—that is to say, angels and human beings.<sup>18</sup> Angels and human beings receive from God’s Goodness all that they possess and are (as intellects and souls), but of particular interest are the ‘purifications,’ ‘illuminations,’ and ‘perfections’ to which angels and souls are subject. In this text, Dionysius does not elaborate upon the functions of these elements which constitute the process that animates CH and EH, namely the cyclical process of purification—illumination—perfection, also Proclean in its proximate origin.<sup>19</sup> Rather, he simply summarizes what will more or less be the content of those two treatises, describing here in DN the hierarchical mediation of purifications, illuminations, and perfections to human souls by angels who ‘are in the form of the Good [ἀγαθοειδεῖς] and communicate [κοινωνοῦσιν] to those after them’ and act as souls’ ‘good guides [ἀγαθῶν καθηγεμόνων] to the good origin of all goods.’<sup>20</sup> The essay now proceeds to an examination of the causal cycles in CH, with a focus on the process of purification—illumination—perfection as a further elaboration of the moment of reversion in the more general causal cycle.<sup>21</sup>

## The Heavenly Hierarchy

The CH is Dionysius’s account of a hierarchical series of angelic beings, ranked in three orders of three ranks, who mediate ‘illuminations’ from God to human beings. As mentioned in the previous section, the text introduces a new triadic series of terms which elaborate one moment of the causal cycle that animates DN. It is here that we find the most straightforward account of the expanded moment of reversion in terms of purification—illumination—perfection. Indeed, the entire angelic hierarchy, both between and within orders, is organized according to it. We will proceed now to an examination of how this organization unfolds in the text.

Since he presents the angelic hierarchy as the paradigm of the human hierarchy, Dionysius appropriately begins CH with a discussion of the ultimate source of hierarchy. The process Dionysius describes at the beginning of the treatise, in CH 1 (7.3–9.15), follows a similar structure as the causal cycle, but Dionysius speaks of a ‘divine illumination’ rather than a ‘divine distinction’ which characterized the creative processions signified by the divine names. In CH 1.1, he specifies that the Father is the source of the illuminations, light, and gifts of goodness which, remaining undivided and unitary, proceed to and establish the differentiated hierarchies. These illuminations, in turn, hold the angels in perpetual unity with God and draw human beings into that unity through the mediation of the angels. Thus, there is here a preliminary revision of the causal cycle of remaining—procession—reversion, so central to the argument of DN, to a cycle of remaining—illumination—unification.

In CH 1.2 he tells us that Jesus is the intelligible light by which creatures are illuminated and describes the principle of the multiplying distribution of that single light through the ranks of angels and human beings. The unitary and undivided light



is manifested divisibly in a multiplicity of symbolic representations for the benefit of human beings who only have access to intelligible conceptions through a prior contemplation of sensible images. This is the reason why Scripture represents angels in a variety of forms: although they are mediators (literally ‘messengers’, *aggeloi*) of the divine, undivided light or knowledge, nevertheless they themselves are mediated in partial, sensible images adapted to our human capacity for receiving that divine knowledge. It is by means of these symbols that angels mediate divine illumination and thus take part in completing the causal cycle for lower orders of intellectual beings, whether inferior angels or human souls.<sup>22</sup> In CH 1.3, Dionysius remarks that this is necessary because, although the reversion of human souls is through intellect, the human intellect cannot engage by its own power in immaterial (or purely intellectual) contemplation of the angelic hierarchies without the medium of sensible symbols.<sup>23</sup> The reversion of human souls thus requires aid, and not only from angels. Jesus Christ, the ‘philanthropic source of perfection’, provides the material symbolic representations of the angels for the sake of the deification of human beings.<sup>24</sup> This requires that the human hierarchy be instituted in imitation of and cooperation with the angelic. The reversion of human souls is inter-subjective: the process of reversion is initiated and ended in Jesus Christ, as both divinity and man, and is effected in each individual through interaction with other human beings in the process of reverting, all of whom take the representations of the angels as paradigms for their own activity and behaviour.

The third chapter of CH delves deeper into the workings of the extended process of reversion, in Dionysius’ definition of ‘hierarchy’ (ἱεραρχία). In CH 3.1 (17.3–9), Dionysius immediately begins by defining hierarchy from within the context of the causal cycle, as he did with the divine names. He defines hierarchy as a ‘sacred order [τάξις], science [ἐπιστήμη], and activity [ἐνέργεια]’ which is bound to God through assimilation to Him and in imitation of Him. Yet, as expected, God remains beyond this relationship, untouched by the multiplicity of created beings, even as He illuminates and perfects them. As he explains in CH 3.2 (17.10–19.8), the order, science, and activity components describe both the hierarchy’s static and dynamic structures, referring both to the various ranks and to the interactions between them in the form of communication of knowledge and perfections effected by the assimilation to God that results from reception of illumination. Within the hierarchy, the various ranks of beings fulfil a variety of roles corresponding to the reversion cycle: some purify lower ranks, while other, lower ranks are purified; some illuminate, while others are illuminated; and some perfect, while others are perfected. However, from the chapters dealing directly with the orders and ranks of angels and the interpretations of their imagery (CH 7–9, 27.4–39.24), we learn that each angelic rank is purified, perfected, and illuminated with the simple, whole reception of divine illumination from a higher angelic rank or, in the case of the highest order of angels, directly from God. In other words, as intellects angels experience complete reversion all at once, with the first reception of illumination, and each rank transmits this simple and complete illumination to the next, lower rank. It is only with the human hierarchy that these functions become differentiated and distributed to particular ranks, depending on a rank’s degree of perfection.

## The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

The EH builds upon the insights explored primarily in the CH, but in the special case of human, Church hierarchies. Thus, this treatise is aimed at exploring the reversion of human souls through the knowledge and activities of the Church. Dionysius is keen to maintain as closely parallel a relationship as he can between the angelic and human hierarchies, but is forced to contend with the realities of human contingency. From the point of view of cognitive reversion, the primary difference between angels and humans is in their very modes of cognition. Whereas angels are immaterial intellects and capable of a simple, comprehensive grasp of their intellectual object (God), human beings can only attain such intellections with aid, beginning with the contemplation of material symbols. In the EH Dionysius seeks to explain how this is possible.

Dionysius begins this work, in EH 1.1 (63.3–64.14), by stating the purpose of the treatise, namely to demonstrate that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is one given to human beings for their purification, illumination, and perfection. Again, as in the DN and CH, Jesus Christ plays a central role as the source of the hierarchy, and specifically of its priesthood. He is the source of the human hierarchy as one of ‘inspired, divine and theological science and activity and perfection’ and is mediated to members of the Church through Holy Scripture. This account places the human hierarchy, just as the angelic one, squarely within the operations of the causal cycle. It has been given by Jesus in order to facilitate the complete cognitive reversion of human souls.

In the next section, EH 1.2, Dionysius reiterates the paradigmatic nature of the angelic hierarchy in relation to the human, but approaches it from the function of the Hierarchy, the leader of any hierarchy, human or angelic.<sup>25</sup> The Hierarchy (or a Hierarchy) possesses the deification from the divine source, which he imitates by distributing it to the lower orders of the hierarchy; lower orders then imitate the Hierarchy by working to elevate the ranks below them. At EH 1.3, he addresses the human Hierarchy particularly, who possesses all of the divine knowledge of the hierarchy and in whom the entire hierarchy is ‘completed and recognized [γινώσκεται]’. Like the angelic hierarchy, it is God who is the source of the hierarchy over which the Hierarchy presides, but here it is God as ‘the source of life, the essence of goodness, the one cause of all the things that are, from whom are being and being-well for the things that are, through goodness.’ This formally ties the reverte activity of the hierarchy to God’s creative processions, which produce not only the being of everything, but also its well-being or perfection. Thus, God as creative cause is also the cause of the deification of human beings: in the case of the latter, deification is the completion of the causal cycle through the mediation, primarily, of the Hierarchy.<sup>26</sup>

Dionysius returns to the relationship between the angelic and human hierarchies again in EH 5, where he gives a deeper account of the functions of the ranks of the clergy. At the end of EH 5.1 (at 104.14–15), he asserts that every hierarchy is composed of three broad components—the ‘most holy rites’, the initiated, and those being initiated. As usual, in the next section, EH 5.2 (104.15–106.3), he gives a fuller account of these components. For the angels, the equivalent of the most holy rites is the vision of God

Himself; those initiated in the vision are the three highest order of angels—Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones; those who are initiated by the highest order are the two lower orders. The human Church hierarchy, on the other hand, has the rites described by Dionysius in EH—baptism (‘illumination’ or ‘divine birth’), Eucharist (‘*synaxis*’), and consecration of the *myron* oil—as the ‘most holy rites’; the clerical ranks—Hierarch, priests, and *leitourgoi*—as the initiated; and the laity—monks, the ‘contemplatives’, and those being purified—as those being initiated.<sup>27</sup> Already by this point in the text, it has become clear that the parallel between the hierarchies does not extend to the structural details, but in this chapter the disjunction is confirmed. The ranks and rites of the human hierarchy are adapted to the particular, spatio-temporal, and thus material, condition of human beings, as opposed to the purely immaterial condition of the angels.

In the following section, EH 5.3 (106.4–23), Dionysius more precisely discusses the relationships between the clerical and lay ranks. As mentioned earlier, unlike the simple transmission of illumination which results in immediate reversion for the angels, in the human hierarchy the revertive functions are divided and distributed among the three clerical ranks. The lowest of these, the *leitourgoi*, are responsible for purifying the ranks of the lower order; the priests for illuminating instruction of them; and the Hierarch for perfecting them, although he contains within himself the capacity for all of these functions. These constitute the downward action upon the lower orders, the reception of whose ministrations makes possible the beginning stages of their reversion. Thus, the lowest rank is receptive of purification; the middle rank is receptive of illumination; and the highest rank is in the process of receiving perfection, a process which continues to proceed by stages all the way to the rank of Hierarch (in which it still continues albeit at a higher level).<sup>28</sup> The actions of the clergy do not compel results, in the sense that reversion is not imposed externally upon the lower ranks. Rather, there is an internal component to the process: the one seeking initiation into the life of Christ must have a desire for it, and thus a desire for reversion to the cause.<sup>29</sup> The rites of the Church—baptism, the Eucharist, and the consecration of *myron*—are the source of the purification, illumination, and perfection which the clerical ranks administer, according to their various capacities, to the lower ranks to aid in their internal reversion.

In all of this elaborate organization are operative the Proclean principles of causality: especially the notions that every procession must proceed through effects more similar to the cause before proceeding to those that are more dissimilar, that the effects which proceed first are more perfect than the second (and so on), and that every effect must revert through likeness back to its cause through the same number of causes through which it proceeded from the first cause.<sup>30</sup> Here, these principles are adapted to the human hierarchy, with the Hierarch and his science of the holy rites as the cause upon which the lower ranks revert, as Dionysius makes clear in EH 5.4–6 (106.24–109.12). They are operative even amongst the angelic ranks, although Dionysius’ description of their mode of simple, immediate reversion seems to obscure the presence of them. Thus, the human hierarchy is a function of the same causal cycle that we find described in DN and again in CH, but pertains to the specifically human mode of the revertive component of the cycle.

## THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

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The MT has been a favourite text amongst scholars of the last few decades, regarded as the cornerstone of Dionysian mysticism. There is great fascination in Dionysius' account of ascent to God, with his long strings of superlative adjectives and his representation of God as divine darkness, so far beyond the intellectual capacities of created beings that He cannot even be represented faithfully as light. Yet, the MT comprises but one part of the Dionysian philosophy, however important a part it might be. And, furthermore, it must be read and understood within the same causal context that animates the CH and EH, since it addresses primarily the highest stage of the human mode of reversion, namely cognitive reversion.<sup>31</sup> Thus, despite his concern to push the Godhead beyond all possibility of conception, it still remains for Dionysius the object and fulfilment of human cognitive activity.

The super-intellectual nature of the process described in MT is signalled in the very first section of the work (MT.1.1, 141.1–142.11). Dionysius calls upon Timothy (to whom the treatise is addressed) to leave behind all cognition and its objects, whether sensible or intelligible, whether 'being or not-being', in pursuit of union (ἔνωσις). This abandonment of cognition is not an irrational movement, but rather a movement toward the Cause that is both the source of and beyond all cognition, which Dionysius represents as the darkness and 'unknowing' (ἀγνοσία) that Moses entered when he ascended Mount Sinai.<sup>32</sup>

Dionysius describes the mode of ascent to union in terms of the causal cycle at MT.2 (145.1–14). The ascent is by way of 'removals' (ἀφαιρέσεις), which he opposes to 'positions' (θέσεις). As he says, the 'positions' descend from the first terms, through the middle, to the last, just as the processions from God descend from the most Godlike (the Good) to the least (matter). The 'removals' proceed in the opposite direction, from the least to the most Godlike, ultimately leaving all conceptual determinations (or limitations) behind.<sup>33</sup> Although he makes clear at MT.3 (147.15–21) that the determinations removed are not just causal processions, but also symbolic representations ranging from less to more congenial to God, nevertheless the process of removal proceeds in the same manner as the reverteive component of the causal cycle, from the lowest or more particular to the higher or more universal determinations. This places the argument of the MT firmly within the cognitive reversion which animates the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

## THE LETTERS

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Dionysius' *Letters* are, like the other texts of the corpus, animated by the causal cycle and Dionysius' expansion of the reversion element; this time, however, not only the content, but also the very structure of the ten letters, regarded as a unit, is obviously guided by it.

They do not simply repeat what Dionysius has written in the other works. Rather, they approach similar subjects from different angles in an apparent effort to complement the treatments of them in the other works by addressing problems that he had left aside or by elaborating upon themes which he had only addressed briefly or summarily. Yet, all of the letters are written within both the context of the structure of the human hierarchy and within the causal cycle of remaining—procession—reversion, including the expansion of the reversion element.<sup>34</sup>

The letters are clearly arranged according to the ascending ranks of the hierarchy, beginning from the rank of monk (θεραπευτής) and ranging up to the rank of Apostle, a rank beyond Hierarch not mentioned by Dionysius in EH.<sup>35</sup> The first four letters are addressed to Gaius, a monk; the fifth to Dorotheus, a *leitourgos*; the sixth to Sopatros, a priest; the seventh to Polycarp, a Hierarch; the eighth to Demophilus, a monk; the ninth to Titus, a Hierarch; and the tenth to John the Apostle. The eighth letter is an obvious interruption of the pattern, but one which is entirely appropriate to the letter's content, and serves to confirm the pattern. Demophilus, a monk, has taken it upon himself to judge a priest, his superior in the hierarchy, and to prevent him from performing his duties. Thus, the interruption in the ascending order of the letters imitates and emphasizes the seriousness of the disruption of hierarchical order caused by Demophilus. In following the higher ranks of the hierarchy, the order of the letters follows, even in its exception, the perfective stages of cognitive reversion.<sup>36</sup>

The content of the letters also follows the causal cycle, but begins from the remaining moment of God's transcendence and proceeds through to themes pertaining to human cognitive reversion. The first four letters together describe the manifestation of God from out of His transcendence. The first two (Ep.156.3–157.5 & 158.3–11) dwell on that transcendence, or God's remaining, and the next two (159.3–10 and 160.3–161.10) discuss the 'sudden' manifestation or procession of God into true human form as Jesus. The fifth letter (162.3–163.5) considers God's transcendence again—the 'divine darkness'—but this time from the perspective of the human need to revert to it. This 'darkness' is above all knowledge, yet is somehow still open to human cognition.

The next three letters focus on contrasting faulty modes of reversion with the one Dionysius considers appropriate to biblical revelation. The sixth letter (164.3–10) is a warning against the projection of violence (τό ὑβρίσαι) against an opinion which 'appears not to be good'. The problem here is a misdirection of mental energy, a distraction from focusing on the end of one's reversion. The seventh letter (165.3–170.8) similarly warns a priest against directing his energy to refuting non-Christians; in this case, a Greek philosopher, Apollonphanes. In both this letter and the last, Dionysius encourages the addressees to maintain their focus on the truth alone. Ep.7 seems to serve as an elaboration of the problem that was introduced in Ep.6, an elaboration more appropriate to the priest's higher rank. As mentioned, the eighth letter is both a disruption of the letters' ascension through the ranks and a reproach of a faulty mode of reversion. The focus here is on the subversion of justice in the hierarchy: by taking it upon himself to disrupt and prevent the work of a higher ranking member, Demophilus disrupts the

entire reversion activity of the hierarchy.<sup>37</sup> Demophilus mistakenly thinks that a priest is in error for showing the very compassion to sinners which, Dionysius affirms, Christ showed to the same.

The ninth and tenth letters turn to more positive accounts of the reversion. In the ninth (193.3–207.11), Dionysius argues that the perfective knowledge of God is hidden in the rich variety of symbols—natural, religious, etc.—and needs to be reduced to their purity. In the tenth (208.4–210.4), Dionysius has nothing to teach the Apostle, but rather portrays the latter, even in his imprisonment, as the pinnacle of human perfection. John perfectly embodies the purification, illumination, and perfection which characterize the imitation of Christ. Thus, it is clear that the letters follow the pattern of the same causal cycle as the rest of the Dionysian Corpus, but from the point of view of a single author—Dionysius, presumably a Hierarch—and his relation to members of various hierarchical ranks.

## CONCLUSION

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As this essay has shown through this all-too-brief journey through the *CD*, the Christian and Neoplatonic elements are fundamentally intertwined in Dionysius' view of reality. Jesus Christ stands at the head of the causal cycle, both in its more general form of remaining—proceeding—reverting as applied to the generation of all beings and in the more specific form of purification—illumination—perfection as applied to the cognitive reversion and completion of being which pertains to rational beings, angels, and humans. In doing so, for Dionysius both the divine and human natures of Jesus are of fundamental importance: it is through Jesus as Son that the creation of all things take place and that the illumination of angels occurs, whereas it is as incarnate God that He provides the paradigm of priestly activity in the figure of the Hierarch. And all of this—creation, hierarchy, hierarchical activity—is grounded in the Neoplatonic metaphysical conception of causality, especially as propounded by Proclus.

Dionysius' interpretation of Christian revelation through the prism of Neoplatonic causality places his work firmly in the annals of both traditions and does so without inherently contradicting one or the other. The arguments of his treatises all demonstrate the same allegiance to the Neoplatonic causal cycle as their foundation, just as they all demonstrate the same commitment to understanding the revelation of Jesus Christ as Creator and Saviour. Dionysius is absolutely concerned with the salvation of human souls through the imitation of Christ and a life in Christ, just as he is convinced that the Neoplatonic conception of causality is the most accurate means of describing the foundations of reality and the means by which souls can be brought into harmony with that reality. Whatever other ambiguities or inconsistencies may remain in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*—and they do—nevertheless Dionysius' fundamental vision of a Christcentric reality remains consistent in its Neoplatonic presentation.



## NOTES

1. For instance, in his recent work on the structure of the treatise *On the Divine Names*, and even though he admits that Dionysius has borrowed from the Platonist Proclus, Christian Schäfer (Schäfer 2006) nevertheless attempts to convince readers that the *CD* not only can but should be understood without reference to Proclus. See Gersh 2008 for a succinct report of the fatal problems with Schäfer's approach.
2. The three most prominent examples of this approach are Perl 2007, Wear and Dillon 2007, and Stang 2012. But see also Riggs 2009 and 2010.
3. I will not be concerned with questions of the more particular consequences of Dionysius' employment of the Proclean cycle; cf., e.g. Golitzin 1994 and Perl 2007. Nor will I specifically address the many controversies which have arisen in earlier scholarship, except when doing so may seem to help my own case. Both Stang 2012 and Golitzin 1994 give insightful accounts of earlier scholarship.
4. A quick look at the notes to the Greek text in the modern standard edition (just above the critical apparatus) and the index of Scriptural references confirms this.
5. Stang (Stang 2012) has made this case very forcefully, even if his account of Dionysius' use of 'telescoping time' is not entirely conclusive or convincing.
6. Hereafter, I will refer to the individual texts of the corpus with the following abbreviations: *On the Divine Names* = DN; *The Mystical Theology* = MT; *On the Celestial Hierarchy* = CH; *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* = EH; *The Letters* = Ep. I will cite passages according to the page and line numbers of the modern editions of Suchla (Suchla 1990) and Heil and Ritter (Heil and Ritter 1991); the columns of the older Migne edition are indicated in these editions, and so I omit citation of them here. All translations in this essay are made from these editions, and are my own.
7. To be sure, other scholars have noticed the centrality of this causal cycle: cf. Rorem 1993; Golitzin 1994; Perl 2007. Otherwise, the influence of Proclus on Dionysius is well-founded: see, e.g. most recently Saffrey 1966 and 1982; de Andia 1996; Perczel 2000; Steel 1997; Perl 2007; Riggs 2009 and 2010.
8. Rorem 1993, 52, refers to appropriations of the Proclean causal cycle in separate 'objective' and 'subjective' realms, and asserts that Dionysius primarily appropriates the cycle for the latter. This is an artificial distinction imposed upon the metaphysics of both Dionysius and the Neoplatonists. The so-called 'subjective' reversion of human beings is precisely the completion of perfection of their objective being. In dwelling upon the reversion of human beings, Dionysius simultaneously describes the process of their ontological perfection.
9. There are a number of 'lost' (but most probably never written) texts named throughout the *CD*. I will not consider them here. This is not to say that they do not or cannot play an important part in deciphering the *CD*'s layers of meaning; rather, discussion of them would simply take this essay too far afield of its purpose. For references to these texts in the *CD*, see Heil and Ritter 1991, 230.
10. Whether the cycle can be discerned also in the organization of the book's chapters is another thing. It is clearly operating in the arrangement of Chapters 4–7, and one could reasonably see Chapter 13 as pertaining to the end of reversion, but it is not as clear how the intervening chapters, 8–12, would fit in the overall framework of the causal cycle. This is a question which could benefit from further exploration.



11. See, e.g. DN.2.9–11 (133.5–137.14).
12. At DN.2.1–3 (122.1–126.2), Dionysius distinguishes between the common and distinctive names of God. The former signify the processions of ontological characters and refer to the whole Godhead, whereas the distinctive names signify the three characters particular to the Persons of the Holy Trinity and only refer to those Persons.
13. Cf. Pr.ET.20.3–20 (prop. 18).
14. Cf. Pr.ET.26.22–24.7 (prop. 23); *ibid.* 30.10–24 (prop. 26); *ibid.* 30.25–32.9 (prop. 27). Note the vocabulary in these propositions common to both Dionysius and Proclus: ἐξηρημένος in prop. 23; παράγω and its cognates in prop. 25; ἀνελάττωτος and παράγω and its cognates in prop. 26; παράγω and πολλαπλασιάζω in prop. 27.
15. The language which Dionysius uses to describe the remaining of the One even in its multiplication echoes Pr.ET.116.15–27 (prop. 131), where, especially, is found the term ὑπερπλήρης. This proposition concerns the henads' communication of their characteristic activities to beings. It is not implausible that Dionysius would consult this section of the *Elements*, since the henads are essentially *multiplications of the One* which contribute a definite character to what participates them, just like Dionysius' processions or divine names. On the other hand, unlike Proclus (at least in the *Elements*), Dionysius is concerned to emphasize the transcendence of God over even His names ('But beyond this, the One is beyond the One').
16. Cf. Pr.ET.36.3–10 (prop. 32): reversion takes place by way of likeness (ὁμοιότητος) to that upon which a thing reverts (i.e. its cause).
17. Dionysius presents the cycle in relation to Good/Goodness at DN.4.1 (143.9–144.17) through an analogy to the sun (a favourite Platonic analogy since Plato's *Republic*), but he most clearly and succinctly presents it at DN.4.4 (148.12–149.2).
18. Διὰ ταῦτα ἐπέστησαν αἱ νοηταὶ καὶ νοεραὶ πᾶσαι καὶ οὐσίαι καὶ δυνάμεις καὶ ἐνέργειαι. In introducing angels and humans as essences (οὐσίαι), powers (δυνάμεις), and activities (ἐνέργειαι), Dionysius is employing the standard Late Neoplatonic conception of the ontological structure of individual beings. In Proclus' *Elements*, see, e.g. ET.146.24–148.3 (prop. 169) and 166.26–168.10 (prop. 191). Although δυνάμις is not discussed in prop. 191, nevertheless its content is parallel to that of prop. 169 (the former concerns the ontological structure of souls whereas the latter concerns that of intellects).
19. This process too is cyclical insofar as the reversion 'upward' is aided in its course by the 'downward' action of higher ranks, whether angelic or human. Although Proclus does not codify the three elements of the reversion process as Dionysius does, he uses these terms in a similar reversionary context, for instance, in his commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades I*. I will give here citations for a few representative examples: Pr.In Alc.108.13–16 and 82.25–83.6 (κάθαρσις); *ibid.* 80.3–11 and 181.17–182.2 (ἐλλαμψις/ἐλλάμπειν); *ibid.* 14.2–11 and 15.14–16.7 (τελείωσις/τελειοῦν).
20. Dionysius only names all three elements in relation to angels, but this is just a kind of shorthand, insofar as these elements are communicated to souls by the angels who act as their guides.
21. Perl is surely right that Dionysius' angels take part in God's creative act (Perl 2007, 73–74). However, he assimilates them too easily to Proclean intellects. Whereas Dionysius' angelic intellects communicate divine knowledge to complete the reversion of human beings, Proclus' intellects contribute to the very production of lower beings, including human souls, by contributing something from themselves *as intellects*. Thus, human souls receive

- their innate *logoi* from a partial intellect; see Pr.ET.168.20–29 (prop. 193) and 168.30–170.3 (prop. 194). There is nothing of this in Dionysius’ representations of the angels.
22. Of course, the doctrine of dissimilar similarities, which pertains to the need for and function of symbolic representations, is a crucial component of Dionysius’ conceptions of reversion and deification—it is addressed at length in CH 2 (9.16–17.2). However, it is impossible to give this notion the treatment that it deserves in this essay.
  23. Cf. Pr.ET.40.27–42.7 (prop. 39) and 168.20–29 (prop. 193), on the mode of reversion particular to souls, i.e. ἐπιστροφή κατ’ γνῶσιν.
  24. ‘Philanthropic source of perfection’ translates ἡ φιλόνητος τελεταρχία. Note the terminology seemingly drawn from the Chaldean Oracles, i.e. τελεταρχία, a favourite text of the Late Neoplatonists, including Iamblichus and Proclus. See, e.g. Majercik, *Chaldean Oracles*, fr.86: ‘... ψυχοκράτωρ’ ὁ τοῖς αἰθερίοις ἐπιβεβηκώς ἐστιν/τελετάρχης’. This fragment comes from Proclus’ commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* (In Tim.II.58.7–8). This seems to be an appropriate borrowing insofar as Dionysius is portraying Jesus as a ‘leader of souls’ (ψυχοκράτωρ).
  25. Dionysius uses the term ‘Hierarch’ for the leaders of the angelic hierarchy, i.e. the Seraphim, at CH 13.3, 46.19–21.
  26. Dionysius gives extended treatments of these themes in EH 1.4 and 1.5, without adding any essentially new material that concerns his conception of the causal cycle. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the discussion there is founded on the doctrine of dissimilar similarities which is expounded more fully in CH.
  27. Dionysius only addresses the ranks of the laity in Chapter 6. The last rank of the laity, those being purified, is divided again into a number of stages of purification.
  28. The remainder of Chapter 5 dwells on the notion that the Hierarch contains within himself the capacity to perform not only his own functions but those of all the lower ranks as well.
  29. The role of God as Beauty and love is a crucial for the actual movement of reversion, but this has been considered more thoroughly elsewhere: e.g. Golitzin 1994; Perl 1997 and 2007; Riggs 2009 and 2010. Here I am concerned only with the more general causal frameworks.
  30. The entire set of propositions on the causal cycle are important (props. 25–39), but I refer the reader in particular to: ET.32.10–34.2 (prop. 28); *ibid.* 34.3–11 (prop. 29); *ibid.* 34.28–36.2 (prop. 31); *ibid.* 36.3–10 (prop. 32); 36.20–38.8 (prop. 34); *ibid.* 38.30–6 (prop. 36); *ibid.* 38.7–16 (prop. 37); *ibid.* 38.17–26 (prop. 38).
  31. That the MT addresses the highest stage of reversion is confirmed by Dionysius’ insistence, at MT.1.2 (142.12–143.7), that Timothy not let any among the uninitiated hear the words of the treatise.
  32. The Moses analogy is made at MT.1.3 (143.8–144.15).
  33. These ‘removals’ have often been called ‘negations’ in scholarship, but this is perhaps misleading. The ‘removals’ are not logical negations of attributes, but rather removals of conceptual limitations, which progressively open up the human intellect to God’s infinity. The ‘removals’ are to result in the expansion of human understanding through the sublation of the content of lower determinations within successively more universal ones until all limitations are exhausted in God.
  34. The letters are much richer in content than I am able to express here. For a substantial account of them, see Hathaway 1969.
  35. That the rank of Apostle is superior to Hierarch is stated in Ep.8 (183.11–13).

36. See EH.6.3 (116.7–23). Monks have passed through the stages of purification and illumination and on the path to perfection, the last stage of the reversion, but formally spread over at least four hierarchical ranks (monk, *leitourgos*, priest and Hierarch), if we exclude the rank of Apostle (about which Dionysius has little to say in any case).
37. On the broader implications of this justice, see Perl 2007, 72–73.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

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MAXIMOS CONSTAS

## DIONYSIAN STUDIES AND SCRIPTURE

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MODERN scholarship has shown only minimal interest in Dionysius' use of the New Testament, and in general has overlooked the integral place of Scripture in his thought and theology.<sup>1</sup> Such neglect is difficult to justify, given that Dionysius expressly presents his treatises as expositions of Scripture, though not in the genre of traditional exegetical homilies or commentaries. Two of the major treatises in the corpus, *On the Divine Names* (henceforth DN) and *On the Celestial Hierarchy* (henceforth CH), are hermeneutical guides to the biblical names of God and the biblical depictions of angels. The opening prayer of *On Mystical Theology* (henceforth MT) asks for 'guidance to the highest peak of the mystical words of Scripture.'<sup>2</sup> The rituals described in *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (henceforth EH) are based directly on Scripture, and constitute the extension of New Testament sacramental structures (e.g. baptism, Eucharist) into the time and space of the liturgy.<sup>3</sup> Two of the author's seven reputedly lost but probably fictitious works, the *Theological Outlines* and *Symbolic Theology*, were likewise concerned with questions of biblical revelation and the anthropomorphic and other physical forms attributed to God in Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

When Dionysius cites from or refers to Scripture, which he does more than 1600 times, it is always with the highest veneration, often employing the same adjectives he uses to describe the divinity itself.<sup>5</sup> In the DN he establishes his famous scriptural 'rule' (or 'law') according to which 'one must never venture to speak or even think of anything regarding the transcendent and hidden Divinity apart from what has been divinely revealed to us in the sacred Scriptures.'<sup>6</sup> Dionysius recognizes Scripture as the supreme and indeed sole authority for all human speech and thought about God for the simple reason that it has been given to human beings directly from God. As an unparalleled

intervention of the divine into human thought and language, the sacred Scriptures constitute an essential component of Dionysius' thinking, and he maintains that: 'Anyone who is at odds with Scripture will also be far removed from my philosophy.'<sup>7</sup>

The lack of scholarly attention to Dionysius' use of Scripture, and to his use of the New Testament in particular, is all the more striking given the Areopagite's claim to be the disciple of the Apostle Paul, to whom the majority of the writings in the New Testament are attributed. It is not by chance that the major works in the *CD* (i.e. the *CH*, *EH*, *DN*, and *MT*) are addressed to Timothy, who was one of Paul's closest disciples and associates. The remaining works in the *CD*—a group of ten letters—are likewise addressed to New Testament personages and their disciples and successors, such as Titus (Letter 9), to whom Paul had written two letters, and Polycarp of Smyrna (Letter 7), a disciple of John the Evangelist, who is himself the addressee of Letter 10.

The reason for this scholarly neglect seems fairly obvious. Having determined that the *CD* is a sixth-century forgery produced by an author who plagiarized passages from the fifth-century philosopher Proclus, modern scholarship has spent more than a century reducing the corpus to its Neoplatonic antecedents.<sup>8</sup> This rather one-sided emphasis has not only obscured Dionysius' debts to earlier patristic writers, but has also severely underestimated the foundational role that Scripture plays for him, and in particular the writings of Paul. Needless to say, it is counter-intuitive to think that a writer who went to so much trouble to pose as the disciple of Paul—and who cited Paul's letters more than 400 times<sup>9</sup>—would produce a body of theological work that exhibits no interest in Pauline thought or theology.

It can hardly be doubted that Dionysius was a master of Neoplatonic philosophy, but it is also true that he was equally a master of biblical theology, whose facility with the text of Scripture and whose range of biblical reference is truly astonishing. It is only by an act of intellectual bad faith that 1600 biblical citations have been dismissed as a mere theatre of diversion; a feeble floral overlay concealing the author's 'real' interest, namely, Greek philosophy.<sup>10</sup> But quite contrary to what many scholars have argued, Dionysius' use of philosophy does not stand in opposition to his Christian faith, and the imposition of such a rigid dichotomy reduces the Areopagite's extraordinary synthesis of these two traditions to only one of its constituent elements. To be sure, Dionysius' knowledge of Scripture is just as profound as his knowledge of philosophy, and there is nothing to be gained, and much to lose, by championing one area of influence or dependence to the neglect or dismissal of the other.<sup>11</sup>

Fortunately, there are signs that this entrenched scholarly position is changing. A number of recent studies of the *CD* have begun to break new ground by focusing on Dionysius' use of Scripture, and in particular his use of Paul's letters.<sup>12</sup> These studies have made the fundamental place of Scripture in the corpus increasingly apparent, and argue persuasively that the *CD* constitutes an intentional and methodical development of theological themes rooted in the language and thought of Paul. Though more work remains to be done, we may very well be at the beginning of a paradigm shift, for which these recent studies show the way forward.

## SCRIPTURE IN THE DIONYSIAN CORPUS

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It would be possible, but not entirely advisable, to isolate Dionysius' use of the New Testament from his use of Scripture as a whole, since for him the Old and New Testaments do not signify or generate meaning independently of each other. This can be seen clearly in the figure of Moses. Following a tradition reaching back to Origen and the Cappadocians, Dionysius adopts Moses's ascent to the mountaintop as a model for the mind's mystical journey to God, which is one of the key themes of the *CD*.<sup>13</sup> And if Moses is the model for spiritual ascent in the *MT*, whereas Paul provides that model in the *DN*, this distinction should not be overdrawn, since Dionysius did not intend these two works to be read in separation from or in contradiction to one another, just as he himself does not separate the Old Testament from the New. Not unlike his unification of philosophy and theology, he brings the two Testaments together in an integral and interactive synthesis.

Thus to focus narrowly on the New Testament runs the risk of misrepresenting Dionysius' entire project. Scripture is a continuous whole for him, and a cohesive, if complex, mode of divine manifestation. For the purposes of analysis, this chapter considers the place of the New Testament in the *CD*, but with the understanding that the division of Scripture into discrete books or sections, each exerting a fundamentally different influence on the *CD*, is artificial and does not accurately represent the nature and function of Scripture in the theology of Dionysius. Before turning to the New Testament in detail, it will be important to outline Dionysius' general understanding of the nature of Scripture and the univocal (if multiform) character of the Old and New Testaments.

For Dionysius, Scripture as a whole has a central place within the overarching metaphysical structure that informs the entire *CD*, namely, the cycle of procession and return. In a moment of self-manifestation, described as a movement of descending or outward procession, the deity brings into existence the hierarchies of the celestial and ecclesial worlds, the latter culminating in the Eucharistic *synaxis*, where Scripture is proclaimed to the faithful. Through the proper interpretation of Scripture's words and narrative content, the faithful are able to grasp their intelligible meanings, and, by moving beyond their outward forms, return in an ascending movement to their primal cause and source in God. This movement of return, which is a hermeneutical process, unfolds both through the ritual forms of liturgy and the verbal forms of Scripture.<sup>14</sup>

Though Scripture is a form or mode of divine self-manifestation, and thus a true theophany, Dionysius does not argue for a literal procession of the deity into the physical writings themselves, as if they were paper-and-ink materializations of the divine in any crudely physical sense. Neither does he believe that the deity has been 'transubstantiated' into the physical furniture and ceremonial objects used in the liturgy. Instead, the symbols contained in Scripture represent intelligible truths that the biblical authors, inspired by God, have 'clothed' or 'veiled' in verbal forms.<sup>15</sup> Dionysius is not the



emanationist that later critics often made him out to be, and to the contrary argues that while God indeed is 'all things in all' (citing 1 Cor. 15:28), he is nonetheless 'nothing in anything'.<sup>16</sup> Biblical symbols, like those of the liturgy, participate in the divine; they are not physical extensions of the deity—as if God were literally incarnated in a chalice or a book—but are rather the material forms and expressions of God's providential care for his creatures.

## DIONYSIUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Modern scholarship has established that there are just over 1600 citations and allusions to Scripture found in the *CD*. This is more than double the number provided by the indices compiled in the seventeenth century by Balthasar Corderius, which were reproduced by Jacques-Paul Migne in volume 3 of his *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris, 1857), and which could not be properly updated until the modern critical edition of the *CD* published in 1990–1991 by the *Patristische Kommission der Akademien der Wissenschaften*.<sup>17</sup> The 1600 citations and allusions are about equally divided between Old Testament (730) and New Testament references (880), of which latter nearly half (410) are references to the letters of Paul. When we recall the relative brevity of the *CD* (about 58,000 words), then Dionysius' references to the New Testament are considerable, though this alone tells us little about their use and function.

The relation of the Dionysian writings to the New Testament presents special problems, partly due to the author's handling and treatment of Scripture in general, and partly due to the literary and theological conceit that he himself is contemporary with the New Testament, in which he even makes a brief appearance (Acts 17:34). However, beyond merely citing passages from the New Testament, Dionysius, by virtue of his celebrated pseudonym, has, in a sense, written himself *into* the New Testament, which is the world in which he claims to 'live and move and have his being', to borrow a phrase from Paul's sermon on the Areopagus, which prompted his conversion to Christianity (cf. Acts 17:28).

Moreover, it is clear that the author of the *CD* adopts the persona of Dionysius the Areopagite and inserts himself into the New Testament in order to identify his theological project with Paul's correlation of Greek philosophy and Christian faith, namely, the revelation of the 'unknown God' to the pagan Greek world (Acts 17:23). It is from within this same context that he addresses his major treatises to Timothy, who 'suffered at the hands of Ionian philosophers', and who had written to Dionysius seeking to 'become learned in non-Christian philosophy', following the example of 'Paul, who also employed the sayings of the Greeks'.<sup>18</sup> In the words of von Balthasar: 'One does not *see* who Dionysius *is*, if one cannot see this identification as a context for his veracity'.<sup>19</sup> We can therefore see the corpus as something like an extended theological *ekphrasis* of 'Dionysius the Areopagite', a literary genre bodying forth the person and thought of its subject, recreating the texture and tonality of his ideas, and summoning up the time,

place, and world of St Paul and his immediate disciples. We have, in other words, the construction of an elaborate New Testament pseudepigraphon,<sup>20</sup> and it is not surprising that a letter ascribed to Dionysius, in which the pseudonymous author claims to have been present at the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, is ranked among the New Testament Apocrypha.<sup>21</sup>

From this point of view, the Dionysian writings are united by their imagined context, a dramatic framework which is in part a retelling of the New Testament, creating major roles for canonically minor characters, who are thereby moved to the front of the stage. In a kind of metatheatricality of the New Testament—reminiscent of Tom Stoppard's 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—figures who were marginal in the canonical text receive expanded roles, while the major characters are off in the wings, relegated to the background or backstory. From this point of view, Dionysius constructs a complex, intertextual correspondence between his ideas, writings, and the New Testament—especially the letters of Paul—absorbing the world of his theological project into the world of the sacred text. One also sees an analogue to the dialogues of Plato, which cast philosophical teaching in a dramatic and literary form, so that the actors obey the laws of an imagined world, inhabiting a canon within a canon. Finally, one may also see the CD's massive reinscription of the historical world of the New Testament as a grand cataphatic retrieval of history, and thus a hermeneutical commitment to the literal reality and abiding meaning of the historical New Testament, over and against the erasures of allegory and the negations of apophatic theology.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE EUCHARISTIC SYNAXIS

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In the EH, Dionysius presents the entire liturgical and sacramental life of the Christian—from the beginning of the catechumenate until death and burial—as taking place under the direction and guidance of the Scriptures. The New Testament receives particular attention in his discussion of the Eucharistic liturgy or *synaxis*. Moreover, this is the only place where Dionysius provides a list of all the canonical books of the Bible, which points to the integral relationship of Scripture to its liturgical and ecclesial context.<sup>22</sup> What Dionysius proposes is a complete synthesis of Scripture, in which all the books of the Bible taken together are a function of the fundamental mystery of the Christian faith. Dionysius explains that the word *synaxis*, which means 'gathering', points to the moment of reintegration and return, that is, the 'consecrating function that gathers together our fragmented lives into a uniform divinization, and grants us communion and union with the One, through the deiform enfolding of our divisions.'<sup>23</sup> As such, the Eucharistic *synaxis* is the culmination of the other sacraments and their perfection, and it is in this liturgical framework that Scripture as a whole is proclaimed to the faithful.<sup>24</sup>

As Dionysius does throughout the EH, he first provides a summary of the sacrament or rite in question, followed by an extended reflection on its inner meaning. He calls this

reflection a 'contemplation,' a term derived from the hermeneutics of Scripture, and thus he approaches the rite as a biblical 'text' to be examined with the tools of typological and anagogical exegesis.<sup>25</sup>

The *synaxis* begins with the hierarch censuring the entire church: sanctuary, nave, and narthex.<sup>26</sup> This is immediately followed by the chanting of psalms, an activity which is led by the hierarch in a manner suggestive of antiphonal singing.<sup>27</sup> After this, the deacons 'read from the holy scriptural tablets,' a phrase which virtually all commentators, ancient and modern, have understood as a reference to the Old and New Testaments.<sup>28</sup> After the scriptural readings, the lower orders of the liturgical assembly—the catechumens, the possessed, and penitents—are dismissed.<sup>29</sup>

In his contemplation of these ritual activities, Dionysius proposes to explain the 'archetypes of which these events are images.'<sup>30</sup> He notes that, in censuring the church, the hierarch's circumambulation mirrors three distinct but interrelated movements: the cyclical movement of the divinity's outward procession and return; the structure of the Sacrament (which is indivisible in itself and yet outwardly multiform); and the overall activity of the hierarch (who works with a multitude of symbols expressive of divine unity).<sup>31</sup> In this way, the liturgical action which frames the reading of Scripture manifests the larger framework of procession and return. Dionysius then devotes considerable time to explaining the deeper meaning and function of the 'sacred chanting and reading of the Scriptures.'<sup>32</sup> He claims that the 'chanting of the psalms' is an activity that is 'co-essential' to all the sacraments, and thus cannot be absent from the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the most sacred and hierarchical of all sacraments.<sup>33</sup> Once again, the integration of Scripture and Sacrament, and the intertwining of the Old Testament with the New, is central to the Dionysian vision of the Eucharistic *synaxis*.

Throughout these remarks, Dionysius shows comparatively little interest in the content of the biblical books themselves, and focuses instead on the spiritual benefits they confer on the congregation. His emphasis on the therapeutic and unifying power of sacred chant, and in particular the singing of psalms, closely follows the 'theology of music' outlined by Athanasius and Basil.<sup>34</sup> Consistent with these earlier writers, Dionysius states that the singing of psalms is pedagogical and transformative, teaching the purification of vices, the cultivation of the virtues, and advances the assimilation of the faithful to their divine archetype.<sup>35</sup> Sacred chant has the power to unify the faithful and thus prepares them for the greater unification that will be given to them in the Eucharist.

Dionysius argues that the words of Scripture 'have a lesson for those capable of being divinized,' after which he enumerates the biblical books of the canon beginning with Genesis.<sup>36</sup> These books are introduced not as individual works with titles, but simply as sources of Scripture's particular teachings.<sup>37</sup> For example, Genesis is referred to as that aspect of Scripture which 'teaches us that it is God himself who gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists,' while the Scripture's teaching concerning 'legal hierarchy and society' is perhaps a combined reference to Leviticus and Deuteronomy.<sup>38</sup> When Dionysius refers to Scripture's teaching about the 'divine works (θεουργίας) of Jesus the man,' he is alluding to the Synoptic Gospels, while the 'divinely established communities and sacred teachings of Jesus' disciples' refer to the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul. After this he speaks of the 'hidden and mystical vision of (the

Christ's) beloved disciple,' and of this same disciple's 'transcendent word concerning Jesus,' which most likely refer to the book of Revelation and the Gospel of John.<sup>39</sup>

Dionysius then returns to the singing of psalms, mentioned a moment ago, and emphasizes their role in preparing the faithful for the readings from the Old and New Testaments. Consistent with Athanasius and Basil, he suggests that the psalms encapsulate the whole of Scripture, and, as 'summaries' of biblical teaching, they prepare one to hear the other books of the Bible, including the New Testament, which in turn prepare the faithful to receive the Sacrament.<sup>40</sup> Dionysius describes this process of preparation with the striking image of 'incubation' or 'midwifing,' which refers to those being readied for the 'birth' of baptism.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the 'summaries' of Scripture outlined in the psalms are amplified and expanded by the readings from the Old and New Testaments, whose 'images and proclamations are more numerous and more understandable.'<sup>42</sup>

It is here that Dionysius touches on the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Old 'announces' the New, while the New 'accomplishes' what was promised in the Old; the former uses 'images,' while the latter 'renders the truth present':

It was only natural that, after the more ancient tradition, the New Testament was proclaimed. With this, the inspired and hierarchical order teaches us that the one (i.e. the Old Testament) spoke of the divine works (θεουργίας) of Jesus as to come, but the other (i.e. the New Testament) presented them as accomplished; and as the former described the truth in images, the latter rendered it present, because the latter's completion (τελεσιουργία) of the predictions of the former established the truth, and thus the work of God is a consummation of the word of God.<sup>43</sup>

Here, the 'work' of God is the saving work of Christ recorded in the New Testament, which fulfils the 'word' of God, that is, the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. While an assessment like this might seem to reinscribe a supersessionist model, Dionysius does not describe a 'division' as much as an 'inspired sequence' or 'order' (ἐνθεος τάξις), suggesting that the distinction is more historical than ontological. That the Old Testament points to future events in 'images' does not mean that its signs and symbols do not yield noetic truths to the enlightened reader, since both the New Testament and the Sacraments of the Church are likewise said to be 'images'. Scripture and the Sacraments have a true iconic and anagogical value, pointing to the same truth that requires the respect and assent of all the faithful. As the hermeneutics of the *CD* demonstrate time and again, the Dionysian vision embraces the Bible as a whole.<sup>44</sup>

## DIONYSIUS AND THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL

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Fifty years ago, Piero Scazzoso published a pioneering study on Dionysius' use of Paul, providing a list of sixty linguistic and conceptual parallels between the Apostle and the Areopagite.<sup>45</sup> Several decades passed before Scazzoso's work found a sympathetic

audience, and, as noted earlier, scholars have only now begun to read the *CD* in light of Paul's letters and theology. And not only in light of the letters, but also the book of Acts, and in particular Paul's speech to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22–31), where his appropriation of Greek philosophy aimed to show the Greeks that their incipient faith in an unknown God required only the corrective of Christian revelation. Against this background, Dionysius emerges as a writer committed to continuing Paul's apologetic project, elaborating on ideas that Paul had only adumbrated in Athens.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to Paul's work as an apologist, Dionysius also saw him as a teacher of apophatic theology and mystical ascent. Like Moses, Paul had reached the world of knowledge beyond human nature: 'It is in this sense that one says of Paul that he knew God, for he knew that God is beyond every act of mind and every form of knowing . . . for he found Him who is beyond all things, and he knew, in a manner beyond all knowledge, that the cause of all surpasses all'.<sup>47</sup> This was already the view of earlier writers, such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, who likewise considered Paul a master of the contemplative life, for whom the interpretation of Scripture, spiritual transformation, and mystical ascent, were closely interlaced.<sup>48</sup>

For John of Scythopolis, the connections between Paul and the *CD* were obvious: 'The letters of Paul show the authenticity of these writings, and most especially the faultlessness of all these teachings'.<sup>49</sup> For John, the theology of the *CD* is an extension of, and thus corroborated by, the theology of Paul. John's recognition is borne out in his *scholia*, which systematically draw parallels between the *CD* and Paul's letters. For example, John avers that the knowledge of the angelic hierarchies was obtained during Paul's rapture to the 'third heaven' (2 Cor. 12:2): 'Here I think Dionysius is speaking of none other than St Paul, for he alone was taken up into the 'third heaven' and initiated into these things'.<sup>50</sup>

Dionysius' references to the 'most divine Paul' are so numerous and so central to the theological arguments of the *CD* that they can be said to constitute an organic system.<sup>51</sup> Dionysius directly names his presumed teacher about twenty times, and cites from his letters more than 400 times, either to subject his theological ideas to an elaborate development, to confirm a point of Dionysian doctrine, or to serve as the starting point or conclusion to such doctrine. A close reading of key passages from Dionysius' major work, *On the Divine Names*, will help to make some of these connections clear.

## ON THE DIVINE NAMES: A PAULINE READING

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At the very outset of the *DN*, a telling point immediately presents itself in Dionysius' signature designation of the Scriptures as *logia*.<sup>52</sup> This word occurs nearly 200 times in the corpus, and is typically translated as 'oracles' and understood as a 'pagan influence'.<sup>53</sup> However, this is a fairly common biblical designation for Scripture, which Paul himself uses in Rom. 3:2 and Heb. 5:12,<sup>54</sup> and which occurs elsewhere in the New Testament and in the Septuagint more generally.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, Dionysius probably intends *both* the

Christian *and* the pagan meaning, employing the same equivocation Paul used so effectively on the day of Dionysius' conversion (Acts 17:22).<sup>56</sup> To reduce this ambiguity to only one of its constituent terms is to eliminate the subtle, multilayered linguistic device whereby Dionysius signals his continuity with the rhetorical practice of Paul's apologetic programme.

Moving a few lines further into the treatise, Dionysius proposes to explore the biblical names of God against the epistemological background of knowledge and ignorance, correlated to an understanding of the divinity as both revealed and concealed. He begins by citing a passage from 1 Corinthians, in which he finds a universal 'rule' or 'law', namely, that truth should never be established 'by plausible words of human wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Cor. 2:4).<sup>57</sup> Paul's distinction between plausible human words and the demonstration of divine power expresses the apostle's sense of a fundamental discontinuity between the 'wisdom of the world' and the 'wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:20–21), which Dionysius has transformed into a systematic principle delineating the limits of human cognition. For Dionysius, that the divinity cannot be grasped by human knowledge follows logically from the teaching of the apostle, who—with a string of apophatic adjectives—describes the divinity as 'invisible', 'unsearchable', and 'inscrutable' (ἀόρατος, ἀνεξερευνήτος, ἀνεξιχνίαστος), an allusive intertwining of language from Rom. 1:20, 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:11; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27; and Eph. 3:8.<sup>58</sup>

The same divinity, however, which Dionysius—following Paul—declares to be beyond all being and knowledge, is nonetheless revealed in the 'divine names' given to it by sacred Scripture, which figures the divine under a myriad of titles, attributes, and symbolic forms. Dionysius is uncompromising in his insistence that one must 'never think or say anything about the divine that has not been revealed in Scripture,' for it is in Scripture that the mind beholds the invisible God emptying himself into the forms of perceptible symbols.<sup>59</sup> God himself, however, is not a symbolic object of perception, being essentially 'dissimilar' to all forms and symbols, from which it follows that, for the mind to ascend to God, all such symbols must be negated.<sup>60</sup>

In elaborating his celebrated theology of negation, Dionysius may appear to have cast off his Pauline moorings and drifted away into a sea of philosophical abstractions. Yet even this most seemingly Byzantine of theologies is securely anchored in a passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Dionysius explains that, even if the divine is called 'Wisdom' (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Eph. 3:10; Col. 2:3), it nevertheless transcends all wisdom, in consequence of which the unqualified use of the word 'wisdom' fundamentally misrepresents the reality of God. And this, Dionysius tells us:

Was something that was grasped by that truly divine man (i.e. Paul), who, having understood it in a manner beyond nature, said: 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men' (1 Cor. 1:25), not only because all discursive thinking (διάνοια) is a sort of error when compared to the stability and permanence of the divine and most perfect conceptions (νοήσεις), but also because it is customary for the theologians (i.e. the biblical writers) to apply negative terms to God in a manner contrary to the usual sense of privation ... And here the divine apostle is said to have praised the



‘foolishness of God’, which in itself seems absurd and strange, but which raises us up to the ineffable truth which is before all reason.<sup>61</sup>

Dionysius states clearly that the source of his theology is Paul, a claim he substantiates by his reading of 1 Corinthians 1:25. This is to say that the signature ‘Dionysian’ doctrine of apophatic theology is an elaborate elucidation of Paul’s insight into the dialectic of divine transcendence and immanence, along with the consequences of that dialectic for human thought and language.<sup>62</sup>

Among these consequences is the simultaneous character of the divine as both anonymous and polyonymous, so that the biblical writers alternately ‘praise the divinity both without a name and by means of all names’. And this, too, is clear from the writings of Paul. In his letters to the Philippians and Ephesians, Paul spoke ‘of the “wondrous name” (cf. Gen. 32:30; Judg. 13:18) which is “above every name” (Phil. 2:9)—the “Nameless”—which “transcends every name that is named either in this age or in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:21).’<sup>63</sup>

The reality of the divine names, understood as the self-multiplication of God in creation, means that the one God is present in all things without being self-divided or confused with them. To illustrate this phenomenon, Dionysius turns to the experience of divinization, which is surely the main point of the entire discussion. He notes that the one God becomes many Gods in divinized human beings, although God himself is never replicated: the one God remains one. And this is yet another doctrine derived from Paul:

When Paul, the ‘light of the world’, our teacher and guide to the divine gift of light, had understood this in a manner beyond nature, he said: ‘For although there are many gods ... yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist’ (1 Cor. 8:5–6). For what Paul means to say is that, in the divine realm, unities hold a higher place than their differentiations.<sup>64</sup>

Apophatic theology is not simply the intellectual negation of a word or concept, but calls for the radical ‘negation’ (or ‘cessation’) of the sensory and intellective powers of the knower. ‘Negation’ by itself is not union with God, which latter requires that the knower be passively drawn out of himself in an experience of ecstasy. The most famous description of this phenomenon occurs in DN 3.2, where Dionysius describes the ecstasy of his fellow Areopagite, the bishop Hierotheus.<sup>65</sup> That this mystical experience occurs while Hierotheus is ‘chanting a hymn’ may perhaps be inspired by Acts 16:25, where Paul and Silas are ‘chanting hymns’ to God when a ‘great earthquake shook the prison opening the doors and unfastening their fetters’ (v. 26). But even more telling is the discussion that follows in the next chapter, where the archetype for such experiences is not Hierotheus but Paul. Here Dionysius states that:

The divine yearning is ecstatic, so that the lover belongs not to himself but to the beloved. ... This is why the great Paul, when possessed by divine love (ἔρως), and



participating in its ecstatic power, says with an inspired mouth: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20). As a true lover, Paul was, as he says, 'beside himself for God' (cf. 2 Cor. 5:13: ἔξῃσθημεν Θεῷ), living not his own life, but the life of the Beloved.<sup>66</sup>

Having grounded the doctrine of ecstasy in the mystical experience of Paul, Dionysius immediately goes on to make a 'daring' suggestion, which is at the heart of his vision of the universe, namely, that the divine itself is subject to the ecstasy of love, being drawn 'outside itself' (ἐξω ἑαυτοῦ) in its loving care for creation. Accordingly, the ecstasy of Paul serves as a microcosmic frame for the larger narrative of the ecstasy of God in creation.<sup>67</sup>

As even this cursory survey indicates, Dionysius sees Paul as a foundational source for his apophatic and mystical theology. These are among Dionysius' signature theological themes, and indicate the extent to which the thought of Paul animates the entire corpus. Dionysius' often verbatim use of Paul's language and ideas creates a compelling stylistic and conceptual relationship between the two writers, presenting an affinity of thought that cannot reasonably be dismissed as mere proof-texting or literary ornamentation.

## CONCLUSION

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Scripture as a whole and especially the letters of Paul are central to the theology of Dionysius the Areopagite. Dionysius is inadequately understood without Paul, and subsequent generations received the Areopagitical writings as organically linked to the theology of the great apostle. If Dionysius was Paul's disciple, it was logical to assume that he had received and handed down the deeper meaning of Paul's theology.<sup>68</sup> Throughout the *CD*, Scripture is not only present by means of extensive citations and allusions, but also constitutes the very form of divine revelation, which Dionysius insists is the basis of his doctrine. For Dionysius, Scripture is theology itself.<sup>69</sup> The gradual initiation into the mystery of Scripture, which is the goal of what we might call Dionysian existential hermeneutics, is identical with the progressive union with God, which is also the goal of the liturgy. Scholars are increasingly recognizing the fundamental place of Scripture in the *CD*, and are redressing a major imbalance in the traditional presentation of Dionysius' thought, which encompasses equally the Hellenization of Christian theology and the Christianization of Greek philosophy.

## NOTES

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1. The only monograph on the subject remains that by Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols* (1984) ; cf. Rorem, 'Biblical Allusions' (1989). See also the valuable remarks of Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien* (1954), 210–225; and the important article by Scazzoso, 'I rapporti dello pseudo-Dionigi' (1968).

2. *MT* 1.1 (997A; 141,2–3).
3. *EH* 1.1 (372A; 63,4–7).
4. Dionysius refers to the *Theological Outlines* at *DN* 1.1 (585B; 107,3); *DN* 1.5 (593B; 116,7); *DN* 2.1 (637A; 122,11); *DN* 2.3 (640B; 125,14); *DN* 2.7 (645A; 130,15); *DN* 11.5 (953B; 221,11); and *MT* 3 (1033A; 146,1–9; cf. 147,5); and to the *Symbolic Theology* at *CH* 15.6 (336A; 56,1); *DN* 1.8 (597B; 121,3); *DN* 4.5 (700D; 149,9); *DN* 9.5 (913B; 211,9); *DN* 13.4 (984A; 231,8); *MT* 3 (1033A; 146,11 and 1033B; 147,7); *Ep.* 9.1 (1104B; 193,5); and *ibid.*, 9.6 (1113C; 207,4–11). *Theological Outlines* could equally be rendered as *Scriptural* or *Biblical Outlines*, since Dionysius almost always uses the word ‘theology’ as a designation for ‘Scripture,’ and ‘theologian’ as an epithet for a biblical author; cf. Roques, ‘Note sur la notion de THEOLOGIA’ (1949); and Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols* (1984), 22, n. 64.
5. Scripture is *πάνσοφος* (*CH* 4.3 [180C; 22,6]); *ἱερός* (*CH* 2.5 [145B; 16,15]; *ibid.*, 4.2 [201A; 26,18]; *DN* 1.1–3 [588A–589B; 108–11]; *ibid.*, 2.4 [640D; 126,11]; *Ep.* 8.1 [1089D; 179,11]; *ibid.*, 8.4 [1096A; 185,8]); *πανίερος* (*EH* 3.6 [432C; 85,1]); *ἱερώτατος* (*CH* 1.2 [121A; 7,12]; *EH* 1.2 [372C; 64,22]; *ibid.*, 4.7 [481A; 100,20]); *νοητός* (*CH* 12.1 [292C; 42,13]; *DN* 3.2 [681C; 140,17]; *Ep.* 9.2 [1108C; 199,13]; *ibid.*, 9.4 [1112A; 203,15]); *θεῖος* (*EH* 7.3 [556C; 123,4]; *DN* 1.4 [589D; 112,7]; *ibid.*, 4.11 [709A; 157,4]; *ibid.*, 8.1 [889C; 200,8]; *Ep.* 9.4 [1112A; 203,15]; *θεαρχικός* (*DN* 1.1 [588A; 109,1]); *θεοπαράδοτος* (*EH* 1.4 [376B; 67,5,7]; *ibid.*, 4.7 [509B; 110,12]; *ibid.*, 5.7 [513C; 516B; 113,21, 114,20]; *ibid.*, 6.3 [533BC; 117,5]; *ibid.*, 7.7 [561C; 127,18]); *σεπτότατος* (*EH* 1.4 [376B; 67,7]; *DN* 10.3 [940A; 216,17]); cf. ἡ τῶν λογίων ἱερωτάτη σοφία (*EH* 4.7 [481A; 100,20]); ἡ τῶν λογίων θεία θεσμοθεσία (*EH* 7.3 [556A; 122,7]); ἱερώταται τῶν λογίων ἀναγνώσεις (*EH* 3.1 [428B; 81,19]), etc.
6. *DN* 1.1 (588A; 108,5–8; repeated at *DN* 1.2 [588C; 110,3–4]), which Dionysius introduces as the ‘law (θεσμός) of the divine scriptures’ (585B; 107,5); cf. *DN* 10.3: ‘One must follow the words of Scripture undeviatingly (ἀπαρτρέπτως)’ (940A; 216,17–18); and Scazzoso, ‘I rapporti dello pseudo-Dionigi’ (1968) 3, n. 4.
7. *DN* 2.2 (640A; 124–25).
8. On this problem, see the trenchant remarks of Von Balthasar, ‘Denys’ (1984).
9. This number, derived from the biblical index of the 1991 Berlin edition, includes both direct citations and allusions from all the letters traditionally attributed to Paul, including Hebrews; it does not include references to or about Paul from Acts.
10. Von Balthasar, ‘Denys’ (1984), 146, describes this as a condition of intellectual ‘colour blindness.’ The problem is at least as old as Luther, who opined that: ‘Ps.-Dionysius nowhere has . . . any useful instruction from the Holy Scriptures,’ cited in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, *Lectures on Genesis 1–5*, ed. Pelikan (1956), 235; cf. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist* (2008), 4: ‘Even though Dionysius professed admiration of Paul, there is a remoteness which suggests that he was unwilling to engage with the person behind the words of the Pauline epistles.’
11. Dionysius’s fluency in both Greek philosophy and Christian theology would tend to support the notion that he was a pupil of Proclus who converted to Christianity; cf. Mainoldi, ‘Why Dionysius the Areopagite?’ (2017); argued at length in *id.*, *Dietro ‘Dionigi L’Areopagita’* (2018), 496–51.
12. See, for example, Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei* (1994), 234–242; especially p. 241: ‘The main lines of the *corpus Dionysiacum* . . . are already present in embryo in the New Testament, especially in those writings traditionally ascribed to the Apostle Paul.’ Two monographs in particular have developed these suggestions with exemplary results: Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius* (2006); and Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity*

- (2012). See also Constas, 'The Reception of Paul' (2016), 153–156; and Mainoldi, *Dietro 'Dionigi L'Areopagita'* (2018), 394–409.
13. Rorem, 'Moses as Paradigm' (1989), which demonstrates that Moses is also the model for the Christian bishop in the context of the Eucharistic synaxis; cf. Sterk, 'On Basil, Moses, and the Model Bishop' (1998); and ead., *Renouncing the World, Serving the Church* (2004), 95–118.
  14. The unity of biblical and liturgical exegesis is argued by Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols* (1984); cf. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la Divine Liturgie* (1966), 62–71.
  15. Compare his rich vocabulary of 'veiling' and 'clothing,' along with the language of μορφοποιῖα (CH 2.3 [141A; 13,5]); σωματοποιῖα (CH 2.5 [137C; 10,17]), and ἱεροπλαστία (CH 2.1 [137B; 10,9]).
  16. DN 7.3 (872A; 198,7–9).
  17. Suchla, Heil, and Ritter, eds., *Corpus Dionysiacum* (1990–1991); cf. Rorem, 'Biblical Allusions' (1989). The translation by Colm Luibheid, which is the one most widely used in the English speaking world, appeared in 1987, and could not take advantage of the new critical edition, though it catalogs 966 citations and allusions, and marked an important advance on the work of Corderius/PG.
  18. According to John of Scythopolis, *Prologue to the Scholia on Dionysius the Areopagite* (PG 4:20D), cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis* (1998), 147–148.
  19. Von Balthasar, 'Denys,' 149 (emphasis in the original).
  20. Argued by Golitzin, 'Dionysius Areopagita' (2003): 178.
  21. This letter is not part of the CD; cf. Eastman, 'The Epistle of Pseudo-Dionysius' (2016).
  22. The placement of the Scriptures on the head of the bishop at his consecration is a further indication of the importance of Scripture in the Eucharistic liturgy; cf. EH 5.7 (509B; 110,15).
  23. EH 3 (424CD; 79,9–12).
  24. EH 3 (424D; 79,12–14); cf. John of Skythopolis, *scholion on EH*: 'It is impossible to be perfected without communion (μετάληψις)' (PG 4:156A).
  25. See above, n. 14.
  26. EH 3 (425B; 80,8–10).
  27. While the hierarch 'begins the sacred melody of the Psalms' (ἀπάρχεται τῆς ἱερᾶς τῶν ψαλμῶν μελωδίας), the congregation 'sings together with him' the 'sacred language of the Psalter' (συναδούσης αὐτῷ τὴν ψαλμικὴν ἱερολογίαν) (EH 3 [425C; 80,10–11]).
  28. EH 3: ἀνάγνωσις τῶν ἁγιογράφων δέλτων (425C; 80,12–13); cf. John of Scythopolis, *scholion on EH*: 'Here he calls the Old and New Testaments "holy scriptural tablets"' (PG 4:156:B); and Nikephoros of Constantinople, *Refutation of the Definition of the Synod of 815*: αἱ τῶν εὐαγγελίων ἁγιογράφοι δέλτοι (CCSG 33:272,29). Note that this 'reading' should not be confused with the subsequent 'proclamation of the sacred diptychs' (ἀνάρρησις τῶν ἱερῶν πτυχῶν) mentioned in EH 3 (425D; 81,2); cf. EH 3.8 (437A; 88,12–13).
  29. EH 3 (425C; 80,14–15).
  30. EH 3.1 (428A; 81,15–17).
  31. EH 3.2 (429AB; 82–83).
  32. Note that the congregation will later also sing the Creed; cf. EH 3 (425D; 80,20–21).
  33. EH 3.4 (429C; 83,11–13); John of Scythopolis, *scholion on EH*, maintains that the word 'co-essential' designates, not an ontological condition, but that liturgy and the chanting of psalms are united in their soteriological goal (PG 4:140B).

34. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter to Marcellinus on the Psalms* (PG 27:12-45); Basil, *Homily 1 on the Psalter* (PG 29:209A-215C); cf. Kolbet, 'Athanasius and the Psalms' (2006).
35. *EH* 3.1 (428B; 81,19-21).
36. *EH* 3.4 (429C; 83,11).
37. Only once in the CD is a biblical book mentioned by name, i.e., Genesis in Letter 9 (1105B; 196,2).
38. *EH* 3.4 (429C; 83,13-14).
39. *EH* 3.4 (429D; 83,20-21).
40. *EH* 3.5 (432A; 84,7).
41. *EH* 3.6: *μαιεύονται* (432D; 85,9-10).
42. *EH* 3.5 (432B; 84,11-13).
43. *EH* 3.5 (432B; 84,15-21).
44. Similarly, neither Scripture nor the sacraments present their truths in a manner that is consistently straightforward or clear. The word of Scripture is a 'hidden' and 'secret' word,' which is 'transmitted to the world in a mysterious and concealed manner.' To those outside the church, the words of Scripture are impenetrable and appear scandalous; cf. *EH* 4.10 (484B; 102,14); *CH* 2.2 (140B; 11,16); cf. *EH* (404BC; 78,10); and *EH* 3.11 (441B; 91,17).
45. Scazzoso, 'I rapporti dello pseudo-Dionigi' (1968), 15-21.
46. Space does not allow for a consideration of the extent to which Dionysius combines Paul's theology with John's, in particular the high Christology of the Fourth Gospel; cf. Golitzin, 'Dionysius Areopagita' (2003), 172-73.
47. Letter 5 (1073A; 162-63).
48. Cf. Constatas, 'Reception of Paul' (2016), 149-51.
49. *Prologue to the Scholia on Dionysius* (PG 4:21A); cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis* (1998), 148.
50. *Scholion on CH* (PG 4:200D), cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, 158. That Paul's mystical knowledge was derived from his ascent into the third heaven was a commonplace among patristic writers, but Dionysius never directly cites 2 Cor 12:2, perhaps because such an ascent would violate the proper boundaries of the hierarchies.
51. The quotation is from Letter 9 (1112 A; 203,10-11).
52. *DN* 1.1 (585B; 107,5).
53. See, for example, Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (1989), 22: 'Even his (i.e., Dionysius) attitude to the Scriptures is given a 'pagan' colouring. He hardly ever uses the Christian word (*graphie*), but prefers to refer to them as 'oracles' (*logia*), using the words the pagans used.'
54. The letter to the Hebrews is unique in the New Testament for never using the word 'Scripture' (*graphie*), but instead introduces biblical citations with verbs of speaking, such as God 'said' or 'says' (e.g., Heb 1:5, 6; 2:12; 8:8, etc.). This oral, rather than textual, delivery of Scripture may have also influenced Dionysius's preference for describing Scripture not as a written text (*graphie*) but as the living words (*logia*) of God.
55. E.g., 1 Pet 4:11; Acts 7:38; Dt 33:9; Num 24:4, 16; Pss 11:76; 17:32; 106:11; 118:11, 103, 148, 158; Wis 16:11.
56. Cf. Rowe, 'Grammar of Life' (2010): 39-40, who comments on Paul's ambiguous use of *δαιμονισμός* (Acts 17:22), which means *both* 'religious' *and* 'superstitious,' with the Greek auditors in the story hearing the former, and Christian readers hearing the latter (or both).
57. *DN* 1.1 (585B; 107-108).
58. *DN* 1.2 (588C; 110,7-10); cf. *DN* 1.5, citing Rom 11:36 and Col 1:17 (593C; 116-17).

59. DN 1.1 (588A; 108,6-8); DN 1.4 (589D-593A; 112-15).
60. Dionysius discusses the question of 'dissimilar images' in CH 2 (136D-145C; 9-17).
61. DN 7.1 (865B; 193-94). Dionysius's interpretation of 1 Cor 1:25 is further developed by Maximus the Confessor, *Amb.* 71.2-3 (DOML 2:312-17).
62. In MT 1.3 (1000B; 143,8-10), Dionysius sees the basic principles of apophatic theology in the texture of the Gospel: 'The word of God is vast and miniscule, and the Gospel wide-ranging yet restricted . . . because the good Cause of all is both eloquent and taciturn, even wordless.' Dionysius explains that the word of God is 'vast, wide-ranging, and eloquent' refers to the affirmations; that it is 'miniscule, restricted, and taciturn, and wordless,' refers to the negations.
63. DN 1.6 (596A; 118,8-10). The preposition *hyper* with the accusative or in compound words occurs hundreds of times in CD, and is rightly understood as peculiar to Dionysian diction, yet *hyper* with the accusative occurs ten times in the letters of Paul, as well as in compound words (e.g., ὑπεράνω, ὑπερβάλλειν, ὑπερέκεινα, ὑπερεκτείνειν, ὑπερέχειν, etc.) nearly fifty times.
64. DN 2.11 (649D; 136-37).
65. DN 1.3 (681D-84A; 141,4-14). Like Dionysius, Hierotheus was a member of the Areopagus, and, with him, one of the few who were converted by Paul's preaching. Upon Paul's departure from Athens, Hierotheus became the city's first bishop and continued to initiate Dionysius into divine mysteries. Dionysius thus counts both Paul and Hierotheus as his teachers.
66. DN 4.12; (712A; 159,4-8).
67. DN 4.13 (712B; 159,9-14).
68. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 5.10, speaks of an esoteric tradition, handed down from the apostles through oral teaching, which Paul everywhere hints at, but which he did not commit to writing (SC 278:124-34).
69. See above, n. 4.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# CHRISTIAN APOPHATICISM BEFORE DIONYSIUS

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MARK EDWARDS

THREE routes to the knowledge of God—the *via positiva* or *causalitatis*, the *via negativa*, and the *via eminentiae*—are customarily recognized in Christian theology. Aquinas, who gave classic form to this trichotomy, may have traced it to Dionysius the Areopagite,<sup>1</sup> but its origins lie, as we shall see, in the Platonism of the second century. It has often been suspected that two of these ways, that of eminence and that of negation, are the same, for it would seem to be one thing to say that God is above predication and that nothing can be predicated of him. As we shall see in the following discussion, we encounter both ways in almost all talk of God before Dionysius; there is nothing heterodox or unpalatably philosophic in the apophatic or negative approach so long as one does not assert (and no author whom we call catholic does assert) that every cataphatic or positive predication is invalid. In contrast both to Neoplatonic reflection on the One and to the Gnostic proclamation of an ineffable Father, Christians held consistently to their inconsistent faith in a God who is at once being and more than being, revealed as the One who is unrevealable. It may be that Dionysius surpassed his predecessors in the audacity of his negations, as also in the tenacity with which he balanced these negations against the words and images of the prophets whom he believed to be more inspired than any philosopher. This chapter cannot purport to be an exhaustive survey of his antecedents in either the apophatic or the cataphatic mode of discourse, but it can illustrate the ubiquity of both modes of discourse, and it can show that the complementarity of the revealed and the unrevealed in ecclesiastical tradition is the key to a synoptic understanding of texts in the Dionysian corpus which its readers have often struggled to reconcile.

## BIBLICAL AND JEWISH ANTECEDENTS

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None of the books that Christians came to regard as Scripture is written in a philosophical idiom; almost all of these fall at some point into an anthropomorphic mode



of speech about God which taxed the exegetic skills of many intelligent readers before Dionysius. At the same time, they are also rich in precepts and assurances which seem to exempt the Father and Maker of all from the limits that time and space impose on his transient creatures. We wither like grass, but he is older than the world itself; we travel in earthly tabernacles, but he is everywhere with us and before us; we are fickle where he is steadfast, blind to the future where he has only to promise and it is done. Every plastic image that we make of him is a blasphemy, every mental conceit or verbal representation is a lie. One of his names is Elohim, an anomalous plural of the common Semitic word for a deity, which was rendered in the Septuagint as *theos*. The other is YHWH, said to mean simply 'I am' or 'I shall be' at Exodus 3.14, and deemed too holy to be enunciated in public reading; its equivalent in the Septuagint is therefore *kurios*, representing the Hebrew Adonai, 'Lord'. A sense that he is too mighty to enter the world in his fullness is evident in numerous texts which speak of his action or presence through his word or his name, his glory or his spirit. There are many Jews today who will call him only HaShem, 'the name'. The freedom (*parrhèsia*) of which Christians boasted came to mean the knowledge of God in his three hypostases as Father, Word, and Spirit; but there is nothing distinctively Christian, or distinctively Greek, in holding that every corporeal image of God, from his walking in the Garden to his stretching out his arm to save or punish, is a metaphor which warns us, by its calculated inadequacy, of our impotence to speak the truth about God.

Thus Philo of Alexandria, while he was conscious of recruiting the 'encyclical' disciplines for a sacred purpose, had no sense that he was substituting a Greek for a Hebraic sensibility when he maintained that the only terms which approximate to the truth about God are those that deny our capacity to know him. The Greek language has a copious and extensible repertory of privative epithets, which allows us to say of God, without pretensions to positive knowledge, that he is invisible (*aoratos*), incorporeal (*asômatos*), impassible (*apathês*), and eternal (*aidios*). At *On Dreams* 1.67 he introduces two neologisms, pronouncing God unnameable (*akatonomastos*) and unspeakable (*arrhêtos*).<sup>2</sup> This is not the characteristic vocabulary of Plato, who is closer to the vivid and periphrastic style of the prophets when he proclaims that the Good is superior to being, that true Beauty is not beautiful at one time and less beautiful at another, that it is difficult to find out the Father and Maker of all and impossible to declare him to the world.<sup>3</sup> Parallels to Philo's predilection for negative terms must be sought in the Roman or 'middle' Platonists who came after him,<sup>4</sup> and we need not inquire here whether they were indebted to him, to a common predecessor, or merely to a comparable proficiency in Greek. Just as none of them goes so far as to say, with Philo, that God is superior even to the Good, let alone the Beautiful (*On the Making of the World* 9), so none of them can vie with his highest flights of apophaticism, as when he declares in his *Embassy to Gaius* (6) that 'God has no proper name, and before him reason slips away', or when he hints that we come closer to apprehending God in darkness than in light, and that the highest form of knowledge is not knowledge in any quotidian sense, but a 'corybantic ecstasy', transcending speech and reason.<sup>5</sup> This conceit occurs in chapter 12 in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life*, an account of an otherwise unattested community of ascetics which was taken by Eusebius of Caesarea as a description of an early Christian order; the same

misreading underlies the Areopagite's use of *Therapeutes* as a sobriquet for a monk in his letters and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. While it sets mystical ecstasy above reason as a means to the apprehension of God, this document is also more Platonic than middle Platonic—though not for that reason any less Dionysian—in expressing the unknowability of the divine through the language of supereminence rather than direct negation. God, we are told, is beyond the ken of idolaters because he is greater than the Good, more ancient than the monad, and more simple than the One.<sup>6</sup>

## THE GNOSTIC NEGATIVE

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Philo's God, uniquely and uniformly the God of the Torah, cannot be conceived but as the almighty creator of the world and the friend of those who keep his laws. As the author of every being, he has none of the finite properties that set apart one creature from another, but to say that he lacked being altogether would be to rob him of will, of oversight, of benevolence—in short, of all that makes him worthy of reverence and service. Even to borrow Plato's locution, *epekeina tés ousias*, superior to being, would be to put too great a chasm between his goodness and the world (Republic 509b). Nor does Philo display any knowledge of the first two antinomies of the *Parmenides*, so seminal for Neoplatonism, the first of which argues that if the One is, nothing can be said of it, while the second argues that if the One is, everything can be said of it. This observation suggests that the early Christians who styled him a Pythagorean were not conversant with the most distinctive element in that tradition, for it is not in Plutarch, Atticus, and Alcinous but in Eudorus,<sup>7</sup> Moderatus (Dodds 1928) and Numenius (Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.22.3) that modern scholars detect the foreshadowing of the Neoplatonic One above Being. Dionysius himself goes further still when he states that God is neither existent nor non-existent, and in this he is undoubtedly a scion of the late Neoplatonists Proclus and Damascius, who warn their readers not to suppose that private terms have any more propositional truth than their antonyms when applied to the highest principle. That being said, we also know of authors writing at least two centuries earlier who not only adopt the Pythagorean language of transcendence (and were seen by their detractors to have done so) but anticipate the Neoplatonic attempt to transcend the transcendent. All these authors appear to have been professed Christians, and while in their day they went under a variety of names (not all self-given), it is generally found convenient now to speak of them generically as Gnostics. The tenet that unites them is the subordination of the God of law to the God of redemption, of the known Creator to the unknown Father: even to say so much about the Father is a paradox, since he is literally unknowable, an unfathomable abyss not only to us but even to the divine intelligences which emanate from his emptiness to constitute that plenitude which Platonists call the ideal and Christians the spiritual realm.

The most sustained and orotund declaration of the non-existence of God is attributed to Basilides, an author who flourished perhaps a century after the death of Jesus and

not long after the writing of the Fourth Gospel, on which he is said to have written a commentary. The third-century *Refutation of all Heresies* alleges that he was led to his view that being is *ouden* (nothing) by the teaching of Aristotle's *Categories* that an *ousia* in its primary sense is the concrete entity, the thing in the world, which is made up of the species to which it belongs and the accidents by which it is distinguished from other members of that species. Since accidents and species are not *ousiai* or substances in themselves, it follows, according to this report, that all substance is a composite of that which is not substance, and hence is nothing (*Refutation* 7.16.2, 18.6 etc.). If this is a figment, it is an inspired one, as it pre-empts every other specimen of immaterialism in the Greek interpretation of Aristotle. Yet Basilides appears to be groping not so much for a definition of being as for that which is beyond being, for the *ouden*—or rather *oude hen*, 'not one'—which is contrasted with the creative Word at John 1.3, 'all things came into being through him and without him there came into being (or simply 'was') no thing (*egeneto oude hen*)'. We are not to infer from this that the Word was the first thing to exist, for his ontological dependence on the Father is attested in the first verse of the gospel, and the 'no thing' which precedes the Word is not only absence of being but its precondition.<sup>8</sup>

There was, he says, when there was nothing; yet even the nothing was not any of the things that exist, but nakedly and without conception there was wholly nothing, free of all mental vesture. But when I say that 'it was', he continues, I am not saying that it was but trying to indicate what I wish to show, that there was absolutely nothing. For that is not simply ineffable, says he, which is so named; we do indeed call this ineffable, but that [of which I am speaking] is not ineffable. And the not-ineffable<sup>9</sup> is not given the name ineffable, but is 'above every name that is named' [Ephesians 1.21].

Parodic or not, this is Eriugena in embryo.<sup>10</sup> Basilides proceeds to say that before the world there was neither being (*ousia*) nor the *anousion*, not even the unperceived, the unconceived or any god (*Refutation* 7.21.1). But yet—and this is surely now the lampoon of the Christian heresiologist—the not-being God was able to will a world—a non-existent world, of course (7.21.4)—in a way that was non-conceivable, non-perceivable, non-willing, and non-deliberating, non-passible, and non-appetitive (7.21.1). With all this Basilides does not make the Father superior to both being and non-being: he remains true to the Pythagorean principle of defining the transcendent through the negative.<sup>11</sup> The same is true of Valentinus, writing a little later than Basilides (perhaps around AD 140) and, according to the *Refutation*, in covert dependence on the Pythagoreans (7.29.1). In his celebration of the hidden Father, he augments the Philonic catalogue of privative terms<sup>12</sup> with *anousios* ('non-existent'),<sup>13</sup> but again he is content to affirm one side of a contradiction, not the priority of God to all contradiction. Or rather, he affirms both sides, for at the heart of his 'gospel of truth' was the banishment of error by the manifestation of the incorporeal in the corporeal whether he believed the crucified body of the Son to be pneumatic or psychic is not our present concern, but he was certainly a disciple of Paul and the author of the first gloss on Philippians 2.9–10,

where the name above all names is no longer a circumlocution for the YHWH of Exodus 3.14, but the name of Jesus at which every knee shall bow in heaven and earth. Even in the last years of the fourth century a Christian writer could give canonical status to the Valentinian dictum, 'The name of the Father is the Son'.<sup>14</sup>

The prototype of Valentinian thought, unassailably Gnostic in provenance, is the *Apocryphon of John*, a text that woos a Christian audience by its title although it gave offence to many by its content. Logicians too might fear that in its sedulous indifference to contradiction it carries the apophatic mode of speech about God to the point of nonsense:<sup>15</sup>

It is neither corporeal [nor in]corporeal. [It] is not large nor small. [It is not such] that one could [say] that it has quantity or [quality]. For it is not possible for anyone to know [It]. It is not something among [existing things but It is] far super[ior]—not as [being superior] but as that which belongs to itself.

But is it in fact absurd to maintain that God is neither corporeal nor incorporeal? Is this not a bold yet logical corollary of the teaching, already axiomatic to Paul, that it was the Son who became incarnate while the Father remained, so that the invisible one was made known by his image who was no less God than himself? Catholic Christianity was unwilling to follow the Gnostics in this deduction that if God can be both corporeal and incorporeal he must be neither; they complained that on the hand the remoteness of the Father made it impossible for him to know or love the world, while on the other hand the emergence of the pleroma from his emptiness implies that he is not so much He Who Is as he who becomes, no more exempt from time and change than the realm of matter. Marcion of Pontus was the most dangerous of the second-century heretics because he could not be held guilty of this error: dispensing with the pleroma, he personified the transcendence of God and his providential governance as two distinct divinities, not merely (after Philo) as the goodness and lordship of the selfsame being. When Tertullian retorted that by God he understood a being unique in power and nature (*Against Marcion* 1.4.6), unborn and unmade, with end or beginning (1.3.3), Marcion would have said that it was because he too believed this that he could not mistake the true God with the fickle and jealous tyrant of this world.

## CHRISTIANITY: JUSTIN TO ORIGEN

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The Christian apologists of the second century are familiar with Plato's words on the difficulty of knowing the Father and Maker,<sup>16</sup> but they are also fond of extolling God by litanies of negation, which are often longer and more inventive than those of their Platonic contemporaries. Athenagoras, for example, augments the invisibility, impassibility, eternity, and incomprehensibility of the Deity with the adjective

*akhôrêtos*,<sup>17</sup> ‘uncontainable’, which might be thought to imply infinity. A similar coupling of knowability with infinity is ascribed by some commentators to Irenaeus. The term *agen(n)êtos*, ‘ingenerate’, which Plato denies to the cosmos, is employed by both Athenagoras and Justin Martyr<sup>18</sup> to draw a stricter dichotomy between God and his creation than is conveyed in Plato’s antithesis between being and becoming. In Theophilus of Antioch we also find *anarkhos*, ‘without beginning’.<sup>19</sup> Justin’s assertion that God has no name is perfectly consonant, as we have seen, with the Jewish tradition that stems from Exodus 3.14, but he surprises his Jewish opponent in the *Dialogue with Trypho* with the complementary revelation that Jesus is the hidden name of God.<sup>20</sup> The Valentinians of this era proclaimed that the name of the Father is the Son (Mortley 1992), and they too believed that this Son had lately assumed at least the semblance of a human body. In Philo, ‘son’, ‘firstborn’, and ‘high priest’ are all epithets of the Logos or Word, who is at once God’s instrument in creation and the mediator through whom he vouchsafes to our finite minds a shadowy intimation of his own nature. There is, however, no question of a physical embodiment of the Logos; on the other hand, when he is styled a second god, this appellation suggests inferiority rather than a perfect reduplication of the Father’s attributes.

In Justin also the Logos is that finite being who acts and speaks as a surrogate for the Father whom the world cannot contain. Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus, and Irenaeus may not be so explicit in subordinating the Logos inferior to the Father, but they refrain from decorating him with the negative or supereminent properties of the Father. It is Clement of Alexandria who, anticipating Arius, declares the Son and Logos to be at once *akhronos*, ‘timeless’, and *anarkhos*, ‘without beginning’.<sup>21</sup> At the same time Clement exceeds all that his Christian predecessors had said in honour of the Father when he declares that not only such terms as Good or Mind or Being but even the biblical titles God and Father (let alone the Greek appellation Demiurge) fall short of his majesty (*Stromateis* 5.82.1). His nature is *arrhêtos* (ineffable), hidden within that power which is embodied and exhibited in the Son (5.65.2). Commending Plato’s dictum that it is difficult to find out the Father and Maker of all and impossible to reveal him, he opines that this is one of the many cases in which the great philosopher learned from Moses, for when the latter recounts his own ascent to the summit of Sinai and his entry into darkness, he intimates that God can neither be seen nor described in words (5.78.1). In fact we know him best through what he is not (5.11.71.2–3).<sup>22</sup> The Father, even in contrast to the Son, is *to epekeina aition*, the Cause above all, more fittingly adored in the prayer of silence than in any human speech (7.7.2–3) and known to us through the knowledge of what he is not (5.58.1).<sup>23</sup> In a passage reminiscent of the Parmenides, the Son is declared to be one in that he is all things, whereas the Father is one *atekhnôs*, in a sense that we lack the art to conceive or express.<sup>24</sup>

And yet the Son is for us the face of the Father (5.34.1), having taken flesh in order that he may be visible (5.16.1). It is through his restoration of the soul and his restoration of the divine image in the intellect that the true gnostic will at last behold the Father face to face (7.68.4). For Origen, his putative disciple and successor in the Catechetical School,

the Father alone is *autotheos*, but the Son is *autologos* and *autosophia*, and there is no truth known to the Father that he does not also comprehend. Nevertheless, a distinction is often made between Clement and Origen: the former, whom Dionysius quotes inadvertently, is recognized as an apostle of divine inscrutability in the tradition of Philo, but Origen is alleged to have denied both the infinity of God's power<sup>25</sup> and his possession of any properties that transcend the intellect.<sup>26</sup> Both claims will be tenable so long as we read the *First Principles* alone, and put more faith in the Greek of Koetschau than in the Latin of Rufinus. They will not, however, survive a reading of the *Contra Celsum*, which is extant in Greek and may represent the maturest phase of Origen's philosophy. Alluding to Plato's dictum that the Good is superior to being, he adds that it is superior to thought, thus coining a formula which is reproduced by Plotinus and frequently echoed by the Areopagite.<sup>27</sup> Lest he be suspected of hyperbole, he explains at length to Celsus that the philosophers are wrong to suppose that God can be discovered through their methods of negation, analogy, and synthesis, and that Plato fell short of the truth when he pronounced it difficult to know the Father.<sup>28</sup> A Christian knows that God is too far above us to be reached by any exercise of ratiocination until he elects to reveal himself. As the whole corpus of Origen's writings testifies, the culmination of God's self-disclosure, in the light of which all previous revelations become intelligible for the first time, is the manifestation of the Word in flesh and his continuing embodiment in the inspired text of the Scriptures, Old and New.

The Scriptures being the only means of knowledge, the task of the exegete is to seek the soul and spirit beneath the body of the text. The analogy between the threefold sense of the text and threefold constitution of human nature is grounded in the incarnation of Christ himself in body, soul, and spirit. Faith in the literal truth of the gospel history is the indispensable premise of Origen's allegoretic reading of the Old Testament, and scholars who denounce his contempt for history are not displaying any great competence in that discipline.<sup>29</sup> Yet Christ was more than body, soul, and spirit; he was also God incarnate. And similarly for the exegete, there is more than the moral or ecclesiastical application which constitutes the soul of Scripture, more even than the divination of typological mysteries which constitute its spirit. The experience that brings the bride to the very arms of the bridegroom goes beyond any propositional interpretation of the Song of Songs:

Then she sees the Bridegroom, who on being seen disappears. And this he does frequently throughout the Song, but unless one has experienced it one cannot understand. Often, God is my witness, I have seen the Bridegroom approach me and be with me most intimately; then, suddenly, he retired, and I could not find what I sought (*Homilies on the Song of Songs* 1.7, p. 39 Baehrens).

Certainly this brief ecstasy is the consequence, as Andrew Louth contends, of a hermetic illumination (Louth 2007: 69); but if it were no more than that, it is hard to see why it should be more transitory than the other acts of critical penetration which this exegete succeeds in communicating to his readers. Do we not see here an early adumbration of



the doctrine, still inchoate in Dionysius but full-grown in his medieval imitators, that there are truths which can be comprehended only when reason has given way to love?

## APOPHATICISM, PLATONISM, AND ARIANISM

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Origen's younger contemporary Plotinus, whom many believe to have been a student of the same master, concurs with him in setting the highest principle above both thought and being. For him the realm of essence, of the plenitude of being, is not the first but the second principle, *Nous* or Intellect; as a Platonist he styles the first principle both the one and the good, but neither of these terms is properly a name. By the first he characterizes it as the universal ground and by the second as the universal goal, but it cannot be said of it that it has either unity or goodness as an attribute. Even to speak of union (*henôsis*) with the one is not his own usage; it is by union with *nous* that we approach the absolute unity which, whether it transcends all being or merely all determinate being, cannot be spoken of except in the language of negation. Plotinus hesitates as to whether the One is *ho theos* ('God', for readers of the Fourth Gospel) or superior to *theos* (cf. *Enneads* 2.9.6.1–2). Only in one treatise (*Enneads* 6.8) is it said to will or to love, and here the fruit of its willing and loving its own activity, its *energeia*; all other things flow from it not because it has chosen to create but because the Good cannot do other than communicate its abundance.<sup>30</sup> The law of superabundance also dictates that *Nous*, the demiurgic principle, will exercise providence through the operations of the third hypostasis, Soul. Rather than equating the three hypostases of Plotinus with the Trinity, it would be truer to say that each of the three hypostases in the Trinity unites the properties of the three hypostases of Plotinus; we are in danger, however, of making him too much a Christian when we attach either properties or the term 'hypostasis' to the One. Neither in Plotinus nor in his Neoplatonic successors are the apophatic statements about the One offset by the cataphatic vocabulary of mythographers, poets, and prophets; on the contrary, Proclus and Damascius warn that even the apophatic predication will deceive us if we mistake them for a higher class of propositional truths.<sup>31</sup>

Christian apophaticism, by contrast, is always tempered by the conviction that we are speaking the truth when we say that God exists, that he brought the world into being by his will and that he loves all that he has made. Both elements of this tradition are enunciated as fully and as frequently in the Latin as in the Greek literature of the Church after Origen. The first treatise which bears the title *On the Trinity* is a work of some eloquence but little subtlety by Novatian, a rival to the Catholic Bishop of Rome in the mid-third century. The tract itself offered no shock to orthodoxy in its own epoch, and it may be because he has no named adversary that (in contrast to Hippolytus and Tertullian in their polemics against the monarchians) Novatian can begin with a declamation on the transcendence of the Deity, mingling supereminent attributes with phrases that deny him any share in time, in space, or in even the most sublime of the properties and virtues that can be named by his finite creatures (*On the Trinity* 2). Two generations



after him, the African Arnobius extols the Son, in terms that are seldom matched in Greek encomia of the Father, as a God sublime, sent forth from unknown kingdoms, of whom the sun and the moon have not an inkling, unperceived and unsuspected by the great gods, or rather those who terrify the world by posing as gods (1.53). The Father is the greatest and sublime progenitor of things invisible, himself unseen and uncomprehended by any nature, the place and seat of all, the foundation of all that exists, infinite, ingenerate, immortal, perpetual, sole (1.31). To know that God cannot be known is the antidote to idolatry; once we have some sense—we can have no more—of the hidden majesty of Jesus, we can no longer accuse his followers of worshipping the dead.

The second treatise known to have borne the title *On the Trinity*, is by Hilary of Poitiers, whose opponent is no longer the unbeliever but the Arian who denies that the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal in divinity to the Father. In Hilary, the mark of a Catholic faith is its humility before the unfathomed mystery of the Three who are also One. He commences the work by remembering that in his own meditations as a young man he had already come to the view that nothing impermanent can be God when he was suddenly convinced, on reading Exodus 3.14, that the true divine is nothing less than being itself (*On the Trinity* 1.3–7). From this insight follow both the infinity and the eternity of God, and hence the futility of any attempt to circumscribe his essence. The more philosophical Marius Victorinus, drawing heavily on the Neoplatonic tracts that he had read as a pagan, is no less prolix in his celebration of the ineffable. The Father, he urges, is so imparticipable that he cannot be said to be one or alone, but anterior to unity and singularity, pre-existent rather than existent, universal, infinite, and undetermined (Locher 1976: 152.24–28). Because the Son and the Spirit are respectively the operation and the actuality of the Father, they share in both his supereminent and his negative predicates. Yet Victorinus also allots to Candidus, his Arian adversary whom many suspect him of inventing, an equally orotund sermon on the inscrutability of the Godhead. For him the denial of the Son's divinity is a necessary consequence of the axiom that true existence pertains to only one being (2.25–28), who as the first cause if all must be unchangeable and immutable, ungenerated and equally incapable of generating another like himself (1.4–6), so that his very impassibility entails the passibility of the all other beings, not excluding one whom we call the Son (9.2–3) Why should the one God of the so-called Arians be any more knowable than the three-in-one of the Nicenes, when it is Philo who stands at the fountainhead of apophatic theology? Arius himself begins his letter to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria with two privative terms—*anarkhos* and *aidios*, 'beginningless and' eternal—before bestowing upon him the scriptural epithets good, immortal, wise, and true.<sup>32</sup>

These facts must give us pause when we read the philippics of Basil of Caesarea against Eunomius, which imply that the fault of his Arian adversary is to think that language circumscribes the nature of God. Since his brother Gregory of Nyssa is the subject of a chapter in this volume, it will suffice to note here that he may be the first Greek Christian to affirm that God is *apeiron* or infinite (Edwards 2019: 102–105). In this he seems not to be following Arnobius, but conflating the God of the Bible with the One or Good of Plotinus, who is infinite (*apeiron*) both in the sense that he escapes all comprehension

and in the sense that there is no limit to his power. Gregory makes both a corrective and a pedagogic use of the principle of divine ineffability. On the one hand he can argue against Eunomius that since the essence of God is unknown we cannot suppose the specific attributes of any one person to be constitutive of his essence; on the other, he can say to the neophyte reading his commentary on the Song of Songs that we should neither imagine God to be known already nor despair of ever knowing him, but permit ourselves to be led in the steps of Moses to the summit of Mount Sinai, where the God who has neither shape nor form to the common eye reveals in darkness the mystery of his will.<sup>33</sup>

Chrysostom joins issue with Eunomius in his homilies *On the Incomprehensibility of God*.<sup>34</sup> In the first, he proves from 1 Corinthians 13 that the imperfections of our knowledge will not be mended in this life, and that such knowledge of God as we have is attained through love. In the second homily he commends the humility of the biblical prophets, and asks how men who cannot take the measure of earth and heaven should presume to fathom the nature of Him who made them. Such arguments had already grown stale in Gregory of Nyssa, and Chrysostom adds nothing to the existing stock of privatives in his third homily, where he invokes the ineffable God who is invisible, incomprehensible, and above all intellection, insisting that it is not boastful to claim to know this much of God whereas it passes the bounds of sanity to attempt to define his essence. No mortal, he avers, can bear to contemplate even the essence of the angels who veil their sight in the divine presence; in the next homily he reminds his antagonists that Moses was not permitted to see God's countenance and that even John the Baptist, with the clear approbation of the Fourth Evangelist, proclaims that God can never be seen except through his manifestation in the Son. The way is thus open for a vindication of the Nicene *homoousion* as the one adequate formulation of the paradox that God is known to us only under the human form in which the eye detects nothing of his essence—which is to say that he is known not by any propositional reasoning but by love, by prayer, and by reverent submission to the teaching of the Church.

## CONCLUSION

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While Chrysostom says much more it is not to our purpose, since it is clear that he added nothing to the philosophic resources of Dionysius, or even to his verbal armoury. It remains true that his chief preceptors in metaphysical reasoning are not Christians but Platonists, even if he is far from his obsequious to Proclus in his coinage and application of compound adjectives with the prefixes *auto-* and *huper-* (see Edwards 2021). If he is no pagan, he is also no polemicist, and barely a theologian of the Trinity; from the Cappadocians and Chrysostom he inherited not a weapon for the defence of orthodoxy but a vaccine against the sceptical conclusion that an unbeliever or heretic might have drawn from the precept that we can know God only by unknowing. The opponents of Arianism in the fourth century espoused neither the naive reading of the Scriptures nor

the untrammelled exercise of private judgement which was widely held to have the cause of Origen's indiscretions. Dionysius has something in him of the mystical strain that we see in Origen, above all in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, where love is the power that draws us to God and thus gives efficacy to the rites and orders of the Church.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, participation in these rites and orders is not an incongruous afterthought to the mystical way, as some critics of Dionysius have argued, but its necessary complement. The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* belongs no less to the nucleus of the Dionysian corpus than the *Mystical Theology*; for if only revelation conquers our otherwise insuperable ignorance, who can dispel the obscurities and ambiguities of revelation but the consecrated types of Christ on earth?

## NOTES

1. See Ewbank 1990. It can be argued that Dionysius gives a prescriptive tone to observations that remain largely descriptive in previous authors. See further Vannier 1998: 418–419.
2. See Dillon 1977: 155.
3. Plato, *Republic* 509b; *Symposium* 211a; *Timaeus* 28c.
4. See e.g. Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 10.3–4, where God is eternal, ineffable, neither genus, nor species nor differentia, apprehensible only by the intellect which nonetheless also grasps him as the Good, the True, and the Beautiful (that is under the definitions of the philosopher's goal in the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Symposium*).
5. See further Lewy 1929; Miller 1986.
6. *On the Contemplative Life* 2; cf. *Rewards and Punishments* 40; *Questions on Exodus* 2.68.
7. Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics* 181.10 Diels, cited by Whittaker 1969a: 97 See *ibid.* 95 for the Pythagorean use of *hyperousios* at Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 183.1 Kroll.
8. *Refutation* 7.20, from the text of Litwa 2016: 506, 506, adapting punctuation in the last sentence and therefore translating differently from Litwa 2016: 507.
9. Wolfson 1957: 155 argues that this is negative term, whereas 'ineffable' would be merely privative.
10. See Carabine 1995: 86–88.
11. I think that this remains true even if one accepts the contention of Whittaker 1969b that Basilides is more concerned with names than with propositions. Cf. Simon Magus on the namelessness of the Father before generation (*Refutation* 6.19.5, repeating the term *aperantos*, 'boundless' from 6.10.3–4).
12. At *Refutation* 6.29.1 the Father is 'ingenerate, indestructible, incomprehensible, unthinkable'.
13. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.14.1, 1.15.5, in conjunction with *asômatos*.
14. Nag Hammadi Codices 1.3.38.8–10, with Edwards 2016. On the philosophical implications of the saying see Mortley 1992.
15. Translation Waldstein and Wisse 1995, including editorial reconstructions of the text but omitting editorial glosses. For comparison with Plotinus see Dillon 1999. On the possibility of Gnostic or 'Sethian' influence on Neoplatonism, see Rasimus 2010.
16. See Daniélou 1961: 80–103.
17. *Embassy* 10, with *agenêtos*, *akatalêptos*, *aidios*, *aoratos*, *apathês*. See further Torchia 2019: 131.

18. *Dialogue with Trypho* 5; on his preference for *agennêtos* to *agenêtos* see Barnard 1997: 117 n. 82.
19. The logical consequence of his being *agenêtos* at *To Autolyclus* 1.4.
20. Justin, 2 *Apology* 6; *Trypho* 22. See *Trypho* 127 for God's ineffability. See further Hurtado 2007.
21. *Stromateis* 7.1.2; cf. Arius, in Athanasius, *On the Synods* 16. The creation is *anarkhos* at 6.16.145; see further Torchia 2019: 183–184.
22. See Bogdan Bucur in this volume on the originality of this formulation.
23. See further Hägg 2006: 154–163. Also Whittaker 1969a: 98.
24. See *Stromateis* 4.156, with the comments of Whittaker 1969a: 94.
25. *First Principles* 2.9.1. Justinian's *Letter to Menas* quotes or paraphrases Origen as saying that if God's power were not circumscribed he would be incomprehensible even to himself. The Latin of Rufinus merely reaffirms the Aristotelian platitude that the actualization of any potential must be finite, so that God's infinite power consists in the ability to create a world of any magnitude that he may determine.
26. Note Williams' discussion of Lossky in my paper, 'Three Theologians' in this volume.
27. *Against Celsus* 7.38; see further Whittaker 1969a: 104. Cf. Aristotle, Fr. 57 Ross. For God as mind see *First Principles* 1.1.1.
28. *Against Celsus* 7.42, where Origen, as usual, is somewhat more eristic than Clement, the three ways to knowledge of God were already set out by Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 10.5, on which see further Dillon 1993: 109–110.
29. See further Edwards 2002: 133–143.
30. On the oddity of this treatise, see Horn 2007.
31. See Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.10–11; Damascius, *First Principles*, *passim*.
32. Athanasius, *On the Synods* 16; cf. Mark 10.18, 1 Timothy 6.16, Jude 25, John 17.3.
33. See *Life of Moses* 1.239 etc.; *Against Eunomius* 2.89 (GNO II, 252–253); Ludlow 2007: 125–134.
34. *De Incomprehensibili dei naturae*, in *Patrologia Graeca* 48, 701–748; Harkins 1984.
35. By contrast Eros in Plato is not directed to God or even to the Good, while Aristotle's God, who moves all things as the beloved moves the lover, is not an object surpassing knowledge but the highest actuality, synonymous with the untrammelled exercise of intellect.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# PHILO AND CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

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BOGDAN G. BUCUR

## INTRODUCTION: PHILO AND CLEMENT AS ‘TRANSPARENCIES’

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ALEXANDER Golitzin, who has provided the most extensive analysis of the early Christian background and context of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (henceforth CD), compares this sophisticated multilayered body of writings with the results of multiplane camera technique in hand-drawn animation:

One of the striking features, almost the signature, of Disney animations was always the remarkable quality of their backgrounds, the rich detail and impression of depth in the forests, landscapes, and interiors of the homes and castles through which the cartoon characters moved. In the days before computers, this impression used to be created through the use, if I recall correctly, of ‘transparencies’, sheets of clear material carrying the illustration of one or another of the desired features of the background—a tree, a mountain, a chair, etc.—stacked one atop the other in as many layers as were required to create the desired effect. The camera was then angled in such a way as to film through the piled sheets in order to produce an image that allowed the viewer to believe, given the willing suspension of disbelief, that he or she was looking at a single scene ... Turning to Dionysius’ Christian sources ... from the beginnings of the New Testament texts to the Alexandria of Philo, Clement, and Origen, to the Cappadocians, to the Egyptian Desert of the monastic fathers and Evagrius of Pontus, and finally to the Christian Syria of Ephrem, the *Macarian Homilies*, and Symeon Stylites ... [i]f each level or layer were to represent a kind of ‘transparency’, then we would ask the reader to stand back and, like the Disney camera, try to catch the picture of the whole. ... The Dionysian synthesis is a rich blend and profound, its depth the product of centuries of reflection on the Christian mystery in the light of much that was best in the tradition of Plato and his successors<sup>1</sup>

Philo and Clement of Alexandria represent significant layers of the Areopagitic theology. Golitzin singles them out as precursors of 'Dionysius' language concerning God and the world' and 'forerunner[s] of his transformation of the Neoplatonist cycle of abiding–procession–return.'<sup>2</sup> The following discussion examines some of the contributions of Philo and, especially, Clement of Alexandria, which anticipate Dionysius' 'apophatic theology'—the notion that the path to experiencing God requires a progressive shedding of all conceptual knowledge and that theological discourse is a matter of negation rather than affirmation—and the multitiered world view for which Dionysius coined the term 'hierarchy'. As will become clear, the anonymous author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* inherits, via Philo and Clement, a version of the apocalyptic cosmology typical of Second Temple Judaism, reworked and interiorized in accordance to their characteristic noetic exegesis; this inheritance, which we term 'interiorized apocalypticism', together with the apostolic persona he adopts, allow 'Dionysius' to effectively subvert competing ascetical and visionary movements in his own time.

The author of the Areopagitica is very likely to have read Clement who is certain to have read (and plundered) Philo. Regardless of how much can be established about a direct literary link between Dionysius and Philo—and we can no more than assume this to have been the case—it is noteworthy that the earliest scholia composed by John of Scythopolis remark on verbal and conceptual commonalities. A scholion on Dionysius' Epistle 1 (henceforth Ep.) (PG 4:528A) notes that the designation of the monk Gaius, the addressee of that epistle, as 'therapeute' recalls Philo's well-known account of the ascetic 'therapeutes' (θεραπευταί or θεραπευτρίδες) in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life* (3.22–5.40, 8.64–11.90 [LCL 363:124–136; 150–168]). Of course, this account might well have been received indirectly, through Eusebius (CH 2.17), who held that, as 'is clear to every one', Philo's *therapeutae* were Christian ascetics of the apostolic era. A scholion to DN 4.1 (PG 4:241A), however, points the reader to what appear to be a verbal and exegetical overlap between Dionysius and Philo—namely the identification of μονή and ἔστιά. As for Clement of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor seems to equate the Alexandrian's 'divine willings' with the Dionysian 'predeterminations and products of the divine will', both of which he uses to describe his own theory of the *logoi* (Amb. 7 [PG 90:1085A]). The scholiasts of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* are also aware of the clear affinity between the angelology of Dionysius and that of Clement. In a scholion to DN 2.9, where the text had mentioned 'the premier among the oldest angels', John of Scythopolis writes:

Note how he says that certain angels are oldest (πρεσβυτάτους ἀγγέλους εἶναι τινας) and that one of them is premier (πρώτον αὐτῶν). The divine John speaks of elder angels in the Apocalypse, and we read in Tobit as well as in the fifth book of Clement's *Hypotyposeis* that the premier angels are seven' (PG 4:225, 228).

There is also an explicit reference to Book 6 of Clement's *Hypotyposeis*, where the Alexandrian speaks of 'seven heavens' (scholion to MT 1.3 [PG 4:421C]).



The influence of Philo on the development of early Christian thought can hardly be overestimated. Clement of Alexandria, too, even though overshadowed by the gigantic figure of Origen, was a fundamental and influential thinker in the history of early Christian thought and spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

## DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE

Both Philo and Clement are almost automatically associated with theological apophaticism and, thus, seen as precursors of Dionysius' apophatic theology. In good Middle Platonic fashion (cf. Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* 10 and its discussion in Hägg, 120–122), Philo describes God as “unnameable”, ‘inconceivable’, and ‘incomprehensible’ (Mut. 3.15 [LCL 275:150]). As a matter of fact, Philo is ‘the first surviving author actually to describe God as “ineffable”’<sup>4</sup> His theological apophaticism can also be polemically charged against the Middle Platonic tradition, when, for instance, he refers to God, at least twice, as ‘better than the Good, purer than the One and more primordial than the Monad’ (*Contemplative Life* 1.2 [LCL 363:114]; cf. the almost identical phrase in *Praem.* 6.40 [LCL 341:334]; *QE* 2.68 [LCL 401:116]).

Philo's ‘collective term for immaterial reality’ is the Logos of God.<sup>5</sup> Allegorical interpretation finds a reference to the Logos in Exodus 20:24, LXX (‘the place where stood the God of Israel’ (Somn. 1.11.62–63 [LCL 275:328])); the Logos is the divine mind (Opif. 4.17–5.20 [LCL: 226:14, 16]), God's ‘true Word’, ‘Firstborn Son’, and ‘the viceroy of a great king’ (Agr. 12.51 [LCL 247:134]). Comprised in the Logos are the Forms, which manifest in creation ‘a kind of impression or copy of their energy and operation’ (Spec. 1.8.47 [LCL 320:124]). What is knowable of God, then, are his powers (δυνάμεις) or operations (ἐνέργειαι); or, as Philo explains elsewhere, the energy of the divine powers rather than their essence.<sup>6</sup>

In scriptural terms, this is the divine ‘glory’ that Moses thirsted after, or, as Philo expresses it in his interpretive rewriting of Exodus 33, ‘the glory that is around You (περὶ σέ)’ (Spec. 1.45 [LCL 320:124]). Explicitly opposed to the utterly transcendent divine essence/οὐσία ‘is the power through which He appears’ (*QE* 2.47 [LCL 401:93]; God's ‘powers’ revealing his existence/ὑπαρξίς (Post. 5.14; 48.168–169 [LCL 227:336, 426, 428]); that which is ‘about God’: his ‘glory’ (*QE* 2.45 [LCL 401:89]; Spec. 1.45 [LCL 320:124]). Since God is, strictly speaking, unknowable and unnameable, the terms θεός and κύριος refer only to God-as-revealed in his two chief ‘powers’ of making and traversing his creation (Mos. 2.20.99 [LCL 289:496, 498]; Abr. 24.121 [LCL 289:62]; Conf. 27.137 [LCL 261:84]; Her. 25.170 [LCL 261:368]). In conclusion, what can be known is merely ‘that God is’ (ὅτι ἐστίν), but not his essence (τί ἐστίν); his existence (ὑπαρξίς), not his essence (οὐσία) (Deus 13.62 [LCL 247:40, 42]).

Both Philo and Clement use the concepts of δύναμις and οὐσία to articulate the interplay between divine transcendence and immanence<sup>7</sup>. God is, says Philo (Post. 6.20 [LCL 227:338]) ‘at once close to us and far from us. He takes hold of us by those forming

and chastening powers (δυνάμεις), which are so close to one of us; and yet He has driven created being far from his essential Nature [τῆς κατὰ τὸ εἶναι φύσεως].

‘That Clement depends upon Philo in his conception of the highest divinity has already been observed by modern scholars.’<sup>8</sup> Lilla himself has provided the most thorough and extensive textual documentation and analysis of Clement’s Middle Platonic doctrine of divine transcendence.<sup>9</sup> Clement of Alexandria alludes to Plato’s ‘beyond *ousia*’ (Rep. 509b) and describes the Father as not subject to knowledge and demonstration (Strom. 4.25.156.1 [SC 463:318]: ἀναπόδεικτος ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπιστημονικός); beyond the one and even the monad (Paed. 1.8.71.1 [SC 70:236]), beyond cause (Strom. 7.1.2.3 [SC 428:42]), above space, and time, and name, and conception, without form or name (Strom. 5.11.71.5 [SC 278:144]), neither an accident nor described by anything accidental (Strom. 5.12.81.5 [SC 278:158]). Unlike Plotinus, Clement regards the One—God—as ‘a νοῦς which comprehends the ideas in itself’; in short, his God ‘is the Plotinian *nous* with the addition of some of the attributes which Plotinus allots to the “one”’ (Lilla 1971, 222, 223). What we may know is *about* him, *in relation* to him—περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς (Strom. 7.16.95.6 [SC 428:288, 290]), ‘not what he is but what he is not’ (Strom. 5.11.71.3 [SC 278:144]); moreover, such knowledge is entirely a matter of ‘grace’ (χάρις), a ‘gift’ (δόσις) coming through the Son (Strom. 5.1.12.2; 11.71.5 [SC 278:42, 43, 144]).

Like Philo, Clement knows that ‘God is remote *in essence*, but very near *in power*’ (Strom. 2.2.5.4 [SC 38:36]); what human language utters about God concerns ‘not his essence [τὴν οὐσίαν], for this is impossible, but the power [τὴν δύναμιν] and the works [τὰ ἔργα] of God’ (Strom. 6.18.166.2 [SC 446:392]). Scholarship has already explored this use of δύναμις in Philo and Clement.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it can be said that ‘Clement’s innovation and main contribution lies in his coupling apophaticism with the distinction between God’s essence and his power(s)’<sup>11</sup> which anticipates the Cappadocians<sup>12</sup>

According to Clement, then, aside from the ignorance targeted by the *Protrepticus*, which characterizes those who lack the principle of all God-seeking, namely *faith*, there is a second type of ignorance, which is actually a ‘knowing by unknowing,’ and which is proper to the Gnostic. One of Clement’s texts most relevant to this topic, in which Golitzin sees a clear anticipation of Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology*, is Strom. 5.11.71.2–3 (SC 278:144):<sup>13</sup>

We shall understand the mode ... of contemplation (τὸν δὲ ἐποπτικὸν) by analysis (ἀναλύσει), advancing by analysis (δι’ ἀναλύσεως) to the first notion (τὴν ἀρχὴν), beginning with the properties underlying it; abstracting from the body its physical properties, taking away the dimension of depth, then that of breadth, and then that of length. For the point which remains is a unit, so to speak, having position; from which if we abstract position, there is the conception of unity (νοεῖται μονάς). If, then, abstracting all that belongs to bodies and things called incorporeal, we cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ (ἐπιρρίψαμεν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ), and thence (κάκειθεν) advance by holiness (ἀγιότητι) into the abyss (εἰς τὸ ἀχανές), we may reach somehow to the conception of the Almighty (τῇ νοήσει τοῦ παντοκράτορος), knowing not what He is, but what He is not (οὐχ ὃ ἔστιν, ὃ δὲ μὴ ἔστι γινώσκοντες).

As has already been noted<sup>14</sup>, even though this passage bears all the markings of traditional Platonic schooling, Clement's approach to the last segment of the ascent to the knowledge of the Good constitutes a radical change of method, a rupture of sorts, which introduces a mystical, and specifically Christian, attitude. Indeed, 'knowing not what He is, but what He is not' calls for 'throwing oneself into the greatness of Christ', so as to be absorbed into the filial relation between the Logos and the Father, and to accede to the experience of divine love. This love, writes Clement, 'is not desire on the part of him who loves; but is a relation of affection, restoring the Gnostic to the unity of the faith', so that 'through love, the future is for him already present ... by love [he] goes to meet the future (Strom. 6.9.73.3–4 [SC 446:208]).

If, at the inception of one's journey into God, faith, by which we grasp the indemonstrable first principle (ἀναπόδεικτον τὴν ἀρχήν), is itself 'not taught' (οὐ διδάσκεται), at the end of the journey, love is all the more 'not taught'. As Clement writes, 'the extreme points, the beginning and the end—I mean faith and love—are not taught' (Strom. 7.10.55.6 [SC 428:182]). Love constitutes the summit and 'endless end' of the spiritual ascent; one 'who has been once made perfect by love' (Strom. 6.9.75.1 [SC 446:210]) is feasting 'eternally and insatiably on the boundless joy of contemplation' (Strom. 7.3.13.1 [SC 428:68]).

## LOGOS THEOLOGY

Philo is perhaps most immediately identifiable by his doctrine of the Logos, which, together with the *memra*-theology of the Targums and the views of the Fourth Gospel and Justin Martyr (including the theology ascribed to the literary character 'Trypho the Jew') is often described as an example of the 'binitarian monotheism' characteristic of much of early Jewish and Christian thought.<sup>15</sup>

Philo himself is careful in maintaining the unity of God. As has been noted<sup>16</sup>,

the correspondence between the titles of God (creator, king, legislator, etc.) and the adjectives that modify the powers (creative, royal, legislative, etc.) is the clearest literary means by which Philo prevents the powers from becoming independent hypostases ... Philo also safeguards monotheism by continually interchanging the entities of Logos, Sophia, and powers, as well as their functions and titles. In this way he avoids coming to a binitarian scheme which would result from the concentration of attributes on only one mediating figure.

It is true, nevertheless, that there are passages in Philo which 'could just as easily have fit into Justin's *Apologies*'<sup>17</sup>. On the basis of such passages (e.g. Her. 42.205–206 [LCL 261:384]; Somn. 1.39.227–40.233 [LCL 275:416, 418]; QG 2.62 [LCL 380:150–151]; Cher. 9.27–28 [LCL 227:24]), it appears that 'for Philo the Logos is both a part of God and also a separate being, the Word that God created in the beginning in order to create everything else: the Word that both is God, therefore, and is with God'. Moreover, given Philo's

contemporary Jewish readers, '[i]f for these Logos theology was a commonplace ... the implication is that this way of thinking about God was a vital inheritance of (at least) Alexandrian Jewish thought'<sup>18</sup>. In the end, regardless of how the writer himself might have thought, the fact that his writings were copied, cited, and lauded in the Church, while being deliberately avoided in the Synagogue, makes it clear that Philo's doctrine of the Logos would 'eventually [be] called heresy'<sup>19</sup>, specifically an example of the 'two powers in heaven' category of heresy by which the rabbis perceived the new phenomenon of Christianity<sup>20</sup>.

As for Clement, it has been noted that he entertains a very Johannine notion of reciprocity between the Father and the Son<sup>21</sup>. In relation to the utterly transcendent God, the Logos is 'the image of God ... the genuine Son of Mind ... the archetypal light of light' (Protr. 10.98.4 [SC 2bis:166]), 'the Face of God' (Paed. 1.57.2 [SC 70:212]; Exc. 10.6) contemplated by the *protocists*, the 'exact imprint' (χαρακτήρ) of God's very being (Heb. 1:3), the 'image' (εἰκόν) of God (Col. 1:15) (Strom. 7.10.58.3–6 [SC 428:190]; Exc. 19.4).

In relation to creation, the Logos is the Alpha and Omega, source and return, of created multiplicity: 'The Son is neither simply one thing as one thing (ἐν ὡς ἓν), nor many things as parts (πολλὰ ὡς μέρη), but one thing as all things (ὡς πάντα ἓν)' (Strom. 4.25.156.2 [SC 463:318]). Conversely, 'all the powers of the spirit, taken together as one thing, find their perfection in the same, that is, in the Son ... He [the Son] is the circle of all powers rolled and united into one' (Strom. 4.25.156). As Hägg (214–215) explains, 'Clement distinguishes between God as τὸ ἓν, as simple unity, and the Son as πάντα ἓν, the unity of all things. ... Just as the interpretation of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* was applied to the Christian God, so the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* was interpreted in relation to the Son of God'. All of this seems fairly clear in light of the philosophical tradition.

Nevertheless, even if 'Clement found already formed in Philo the doctrine of the Logos as the totality of powers which are identical with the ideas'<sup>22</sup>, he is here fusing the Logos speculation with an established teaching on the 'powers of the spirit' that originated in Jewish or Jewish–Christian speculation about angelic 'powers'. It is significant that in the above passage Clement quotes Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13 ('the Word is called the Alpha and the Omega ...'). What he has in mind is surely the throne-visions of Revelation, depicting the seven spirits or angels in attendance before the throne (Rev. 1:4; 8:2). Clement knows about δύναμις as an angelic being (e.g. Strom. 2.1.3.5 [SC 38:34], in reference to the angelic 'power' that spoke to Hermas); like other early Christian writers, he exploits the double (philosophical and Jewish–Christian) affiliation of the concept in order to ascertain his credibility in both areas.

The point where Clement's view of the Logos appears deeply Christian is his re-envisioning of the Scriptures of Israel as a coherent story leading from Genesis to Jesus, according to the widespread interpretation of biblical theophanies as manifestations of the Logos-to-be-incarnate—'Christophanies'. In a long section of his *Paedagogue* (1.7.56.1–61.3 [SC 70:174–220]) Clement identifies the Logos, 'our pedagogue, the holy God Jesus' (ὁ δὲ ἡμέτερος παιδαγωγὸς ἅγιος θεὸς Ἰησοῦς) with the 'Lord' who appeared to Abraham (Gen. 17:1), who appeared to Jacob on top of the ladder and in the nightly

struggle (Gen. 28; 32), who led Israel out of Egypt and led the people through the desert, who gave the Law through his servant Moses (Exodus 20:2; Deut. 32:10-12), who enjoined Israel to 'fear God' (Deut. 6:2), and who spoke to the prophets, in the course of such theophanies as Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1. The difference between 'that hidden angel, Jesus' (ὁ μυστικὸς ἐκεῖνος ἄγγελος Ἰησοῦς) present in Old Testament theophanies and the man Jesus of Nazareth is, quite simply, that the Logos came to be born (γεγέννηται; τίκεται).

Even though the *Corpus Dionysiacum* reflects the mature Trinitarian doctrine of a post-Cappadocian age, this work can also be seen as a sophisticated form of Logos theology. Indeed, Dionysius' framework for understanding the divine outpourings—both the revelational, providential, and saving procession along the celestial hierarchy, and its ritual counterpart, the ritual processions from the altar into the nave—is Christological. Christ abides 'beyond beingly' (ὑπερουσίως), 'beyond all things' in his divinity (EH 1.3 [PG 3:373D]; Ep. 4 [PG 3:1072A]), transcendent and immovable on his throne (Ep. 9:3 [PG 3: 1109C]); at the same time, however, inasmuch as he is the 'thearchy', 'ray', 'providence', and so forth, he bestows on created beings fragrance, happiness, nourishment, divine pleasure (EH 4.3, esp. 1–4 [PG 3: 473B–480B]), and most divine inspirations (EH 4.3.10 [PG 3:481D]). Moreover, the converse movement, 'the created world's increasing participation in God's Providence,' is also 'concentrated ... specifically in the second Person of the Trinity'<sup>23</sup>.

This Christological framing of both 'movements' reflects Dionysius' agreement with the larger early Christian and later Byzantine tradition on the following two points: first, that Old Testament theophanies are all manifestations of the divine Logos (see Ep. 9.1 [PG 3:1105A] and CH 1.2 [PG 3:121A], together with the detailed analysis by Perczel 1999, 82–83); and, second, that 'the Incarnation is ... the result—we might almost say the inescapable result—of that movement of God that weaves together all the Dionysian universe'<sup>24</sup>. Here, too, we can discern a distant echo of the Alexandrian master, who, like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyril of Alexandria, Anastasius the Sinaite, Maximus the Confessor, Isaac of Nineveh, and Nicholas Cabasilas, viewed the Incarnation 'as a mystery of God's primordial design, essentially unrelated to the Fall'.<sup>25</sup>

## A Proto-Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy

It has been said that, for Dionysius, the hierarchy is not one among other features of his world view: the hierarchy *is* the world<sup>26</sup>. Clement of Alexandria seems to view reality in a similar way:

Christ has turned the world into an ocean of blessings ... The whole of the new creation is a saving *activity*. Every part does something to carry the world forward and to lift it higher. It is saving and being saved. Its *hierarchy* expands the Platonic world of forms. It is powerful as the *energeia* of God. The world culminates in the ever-present word whose light penetrates everywhere and casts no shadow<sup>27</sup>.

Leaving aside the use of ‘hierarchy’—Dionysius’ coinage—this beautiful description is unmistakably ‘Dionysian’. It was, after all, the Areopagite who defined the hierarchy as ‘a sacred order, a state of understanding, and an activity (ἐνέργεια)’ (CH 3.1 [164D]) and ‘a gift to ensure the salvation and divinization of every being endowed with reason and intelligence’ (EH 1.4, 376B).

Although the similarity between the Clementine and Dionysian ‘hierarchies’ was evident to the ancients—see the earlier reference to John of Scythopolis—it is only seldom addressed in scholarship. The exceptions, therefore, deserve special mention. While considering the possible connections between Clement’s ‘celestial hierarchy’ and later developments, Bousset (1915, 179 n. 1) points to the ‘line’ uniting the latter to the Dionysian system. There is, then, Utto Riedinger’s demonstration that the Clementine treatise ‘On Angels,’ contained in the *Hypotyposeis*, was paraphrased in a section of Ps.-Caesarius’ *Erotapokriseis*, a little-known writing stemming from the same monastic environment that is likely to have produced the *Corpus Dionysiacum*<sup>28</sup>. Finally, Golitzin and Bucur have argued, in their discussions of Dionysius and Clement, respectively, that Clement’s angelic hierarchy is, indeed, one of the major sources of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*<sup>29</sup>.

Dionysius’ *Celestial Hierarchy* is set forth as a theological expansion on the famous verse from the Catholic Epistle of James, quoted in the very opening of the work, ‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of lights’ (James 1:17), and that the divine ray cascading along the various levels of the hierarchy is identified with the Logos and follows the kenotic logic revealed by the Incarnation: the Ray goes forth and permeates all levels of existence ‘in a hidden way,’ concealed by the fact that it is revealed adaptively, ‘in due proportion,’ ‘according to their power of divine contemplation.’ The hierarchy serves precisely the purpose of regulating the divine outpouring from one level to the next and the corresponding initiation of each level into the experience of divine light; hierarchical revelation is, therefore, a synergistic phenomenon in which the divine Logos models the initiatory service which the higher renders to the lower: ‘in imitation of God it has been established that each being is somehow superior to the one to whom he passes on the divine light’ (CH 13.3 [301D]).

It should be noted, first of all, that the multistoried spiritual world was abundantly present in the apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism, and was also inherited by early Christians (e.g. Mart. Ascen. Isa., 2 En., Ep. Apos.). Scholarship has discussed the fact that Clement of Alexandria adopts here a theological tradition that goes back to an older generation of Jewish–Christian ‘elders’<sup>30</sup>. According to Daniélou, it represented ‘the continuation within Christianity of a Jewish esotericism that existed at the time of the apostles,’ it consisted of oral instruction going back to the apostles themselves, and it was aimed primarily at relating the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection to the mysteries of the heavenly world<sup>31</sup>. This confirms the hypothesis that the centrality of the hierarchically ordered universe and its denizens was an important ‘archaizing’ feature of the Dionysian work, subordinated to one of the likely goals of this ‘New Testament pseudepigraphon’—namely the subversion of similar apocalyptic



imagery (and associated doctrines) among competing groups in Christianity (Golitzin 2013, 11–12).

Clement's description of a celestial hierarchy occurs in his Exc. 10, 11, and 27 and Proph. Ecl. 56–57 (and, in a somewhat more veiled manner, in Strom. 6.16.148.6; 7.2.9.3 [SC 428:60]). The Father's light pours forth from the Logos, the Face of God and beginning and principle (ἀρχή) of the hierarchy, and is channelled in descending order, each level of the hierarchy being 'moved' by the one above it, and in turn 'moving' the one immediately lower: from the seven 'first created' (πρωτόκτιστοι)—here Clement echoes Jewish and Christian traditions about the sevenfold highest angelic company<sup>32</sup>—to the archangels, to the angels, who then make contact with humanity. In relation to Christ, the *protocists* present the prayers ascending from below; in relation to the subordinate levels of reality, they serve in a 'high priestly' mode as mediators of the *visio dei* to the archangels, just as the archangels are 'high priests' to the angels.

## Hierarchy as the Framework for Understanding Inspiration and Vision

Clement's cosmic ladder provides the framework for a discussion of prophetic inspiration. Prophecy occurs when the Logos moves the first rank of the *protocists*, and this movement is transmitted down the angelic hierarchy to the lowest angelic rank, who then transmits it to the prophet. Through a sort of telescoping effect, the first mover—the Logos—is simultaneously far removed from the effect of prophecy and immediately present. The action of inspiration must be referred to the original mover, the Logos, since Clement also applies the outlined theory of angelic mediation to the prophetic call of Samuel (1 Sam. 3), where the text repeatedly mentions the Lord or the voice of the Lord (Adumbr. 1 John 2:1). This principle of 'mediated immediacy' becomes evident when Clement says that Jude refers the action of a lower angel ('an angel near us') to a superior angelic entity, the archangel Michael: '*When the archangel Michael, disputing with the devil, was arguing over the body of Moses: ...* 'Michael' here designates the one who argued with the devil through an angel close to us' (Adumbr. Jude 9). Similarly, 'Moses calls on the power of the angel Michael through an angel near to himself and of the lowest degree, *vicinum sibi et infimum*' (Adumbr. 1 John 2:1). Generally speaking, divine providence leads souls to repentance 'by means of the proximate angels' (Strom. 7.2.12.5 [SC 428:66]), and this also applies to the gift of philosophy to the pagans: the Logos 'gave philosophy to the Greeks by means of the inferior angels' (Strom. 7.2.6.4 [SC 428:52]).

In conclusion, the prophet receives the presence and message of the Logos through the mediation of the hierarchy, and experiences it, ultimately, in the 'in-working' of the proximate angel. According to Clement, 'moved by the Lord, the first-created angels worked in the angels that are close to the prophets'; this is how 'the covenants were wrought (ἐνργήθησαν) by the visitation of angels, namely those upon Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses' (Proph. Ecl. 51.2).



Clement's view here anticipates the Dionysian explanation, at CH 13.1, of 'the reason why the prophet Isaiah is said to have been purified by the Seraphim.' Indeed, the biblical text (Isaiah 6), which narrates the prophet's tremendous vision of the enthroned Lord worshipped by the seraphim, and his subsequent purification by one of the seraphim, seems to contradict the logic of Dionysius' hierarchy, in which humans only interact with their immediate superiors, the lowest ranks of celestial powers.

Dionysius presents two possible answers to this dilemma, both of which he ascribes to unnamed others. According to the first explanation (CH 13.3.2 [300BC]), the phrase 'one of the seraphim' in Isaiah's vision is purely functional and refers to the fiery and purifying presence of a celestial agent who is, nevertheless, a mere angel—'one of those angels assigned to us' (τῶν ἡμῖν ἐφεστηκότων ἀγγέλων), 'one of those powers assigned to purify us' (τῶν ἡμῖν ἐφεστηκυῶν καθαρτικῶν δυνάμεων). The second explanation, which Dionysius prefers, maintains the same view about the celestial agent who interacts with the prophet—the vision revealed to the theologian came from one of those holy and blessed angels assigned to look after us, δι' ἑνὸς τῶν ἐπιστατούντων ἡμῖν ἁγίων καὶ μακαρίων ἀγγέλων' (CH 13.4 [304BC])—but offers a more sophisticated account for the designation of this angel as 'seraph'. That divine outpouring, which our proximate angel has received, filtered pedagogically, from the various ranks of celestial beings, is now passed on to the prophet, and the proximate angel filters and adapts it in turn for Isaiah's all-too-human receptive capacity. Briefly put, the angel was called 'seraph' because he 'sacredly worked out the purification of the theologian' (CH 13.4 [305C]) in accordance with the general law of the hierarchy, which is that celestial beings attribute 'all their sacred activity, done in imitation of God . . . to the senior intelligent beings who live in conformity with God and who are the first ministers and teachers of the divine things' (CH 13.3 [304A]. cf. 304B: 'to those primary beings, the ones who, after God, are like hierarchs to them').

By taking Isaiah into his very own comprehension of things divine (μεταδιδόντος τῆς οἰκειᾶς ἱερογνωσίας), the angel acted as a mystagogue and a photagogue: thus, Isaiah was initiated—ἐμυσταγωγεῖτο—by 'the Angel who was leading him to light' (τοῦ φωταγωγούντος ἀγγέλου) into the thrice-holy hymn of the seraphim and given experiential knowledge about the divine purification and all the divine operations shining forth through the First Beings (πάσας τὰς θεαρχικὰς ἐνεργείας διὰ τῶν πρώτων οὐσιῶν ἀναλαμβάνουσας).

A significant difference between Clement and the Areopagite must be noted at this point. For Clement, the contact point between the human and the angelic worlds—the Dionysian φιλάγγελος—is not the bishop, as in Dionysius' *Hierarchies*, but rather (as in *Revelation*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*) the prophet—and, in the new dispensation, the Gnostic ascetic. Even though he writes about 'the advancements (προκοπαί) pertaining to the Church here below, namely those of bishops, presbyters and deacons', as 'imitations (μιμήματα) of the angelic glory' (Strom. 6.13.107.2 [SC 446:274]), for Clement the designations of 'bishop', 'priest', and 'deacon' point to stages of spiritual advancement rather than to ecclesiastical offices (Strom. 6.13.106.2; 107.2–3 [SC 446:272, 274]). Dionysius' own theological and polemical agenda

dictated an important modification of this vision, resulting in the idealized picture of perfect coincidence between the bishop's *taxis* in the ecclesial hierarchy and his spiritual excellence.

## *Theōsis/Deification*

It is Clement who bequeathed to later generations the very term designating the horizon towards which Christian advances asymptotically: 'deification'. For him, the perfected Christian 'studies to be a god' (μελετᾷ εἶναι θεός), is expected to become 'a god going about in the flesh' (ἐν σαρκὶ περιπολῶν θεός), and can even be called 'divine' (θεῖος), and 'already holy' (ἤδη ἅγιος), God-bearing, and God-borne, θεοφορῶν καὶ θεοφορούμενος (Strom. 6.14.113.3 [SC 446:286]; 7.16.101.4 [SC 428:304]; 7.13.82.2 [SC 428:250, 252]).

But it is, yet again, the interiorized ascent to heaven and transformation before the divine Face, so prominent in Jewish apocalypticism, and the archaic theory of the 'elders', postulating the celestial hierarchy as the locus of a real transformation from archangels into *protocists*, from angels into archangels, and from humans into angels, which sheds light on Clement's understanding of 'deification'. Deification—becoming and functioning as a god—means, for Clement, that one has attained to the rank of the *protocists* so as to be 'called by the appellation of 'gods', to be co-enthroned with the other 'gods' who were first assigned (πρῶτων τεταγμένων) beneath the Savior' (Strom. 7.10.56.6 [SC 428:184]). Clement's perfect Gnostic is not just 'functionally' angelic—that is, 'angelic' inasmuch as he imitates and has attained closeness to the angelic model—but a human being actually in the process of becoming an angel.

Continuing Philo's 'noetic exegesis' of authoritative, biblical, and 'Greek' texts, Clement internalizes the cosmic ladder and the associated experience of ascent and transformation. The principle, articulated at Strom. 5.11.71.5 [SC 278:144], that one should not ascribe to God 'form and motion, or standing, or a throne, or place, or right hand or left . . . *although it is so written*', anticipates the Dionysian concern (e.g. in CH 2.1–2; 15) over the literal understanding of the many anthropomorphisms, teriomorphism, and other earthbound imagery that the Bible uses in reference to the heavenly realms. For Clement, all imagistic details, such as specific intervals of space or time ('seven days', 'one thousand years', 'seven heavens', archangels, *protocists*, etc.) are emptied of the literal meaning they had had in the apocalyptic cosmology of the 'elders':

Whether, then, the time be that which through the seven periods enumerated returns to the chiefest rest, or the seven heavens, which some reckon one above the other; or whether also the fixed sphere which borders on the intellectual world be called the eighth, the expression denotes that the Gnostic ought to rise out of the sphere of creation and of sin (Strom. 4.25.159.2 [SC 463:320, 322]).

A fitting formula to describe Clement of Alexandria's treatment of the inherited apocalyptic cosmology of the elders would be 'interiorized apocalypticism'. This term has been

proposed for the use of apocalyptic motifs in Byzantine monastic literature, and its definition seems perfectly applicable to Clement: 'the transposition of the cosmic setting of apocalyptic literature, and in particular of the "out of body" experience of heavenly ascent and transformation, to the inner theater of the soul'<sup>33</sup>. Reread in this manner, the cosmic ladder becomes a metaphor for the spiritual ascent of every believer.

The ideal of a transformative ascent or 'advancement' (προκοπή) along the spiritual levels (τάξεις) of the hierarchy would remain at the heart of the Christian tradition. Dionysius also views deification as the God-given mode of existence in which all levels of creation participate, since God 'has resolved ... to ensure *the salvation of rational beings, both ourselves and those beings who are our superior*. This can only happen with the divinization of the saved. And divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God' (EH 1.3 [373D–376A], emphasis added).

Nevertheless, a major difference between Clement and Dionysius should be noted. For Clement, the ascent leads to the progressive transformation of one level into the next, because he 'does not see an essential difference between humans, angels, and *protocists*'<sup>34</sup>; indeed, '[t]he different degrees of the hierarchy are not immutable natures, but rather degrees of a spiritual ascent, so that it is possible to pass from one order to the next'<sup>35</sup>. Clement lays the groundwork for Origen's depiction of human life as the transitional stage on the fluid spectrum ranging from angelic to demonic (Origen, Comm. Jn. 2.144–148; Princ. 4.4.9), with the ascetic life understood as part of the vast process by which human souls, under angelic instruction and assistance, are 'taken up into the order of angels' (Origen, Princ. 1.8.4; 1.6.3), and thence continue to be guided by increasingly higher powers (Origen, Princ. 1.6.3). The fluidity of the various levels within a temporary hierarchy, envisioned by Clement, Origen, and Evagrius, was replaced, in Ps-Dionysius, by a 'stable' hierarchy of originally and permanently distinct levels. Golitzin's observations about the difference, in this respect, between Origen and Evagrius, on the one hand, and Ps-Dionysius, on the other are perfectly applicable to Clement of Alexandria:

[For Origen] every difference, every hierarchy, is not due to any intrinsic difference or 'inequality' in the created nature of rational beings, but to different, temporarily assigned functions: '... the names are not names of the natures of living things, but of functions [τάξεις] with which such or such a spiritual nature has been invested by God' (In Jn. II:23). We take particular note of this use of τάξις as being in direct contrast to the use to which Dionysius will put it. Unlike Dionysius, for whom the τάξεις are the expression of the λόγοι that God's eternal Providence has for each creature, Origen understands the term as referring exclusively to the action taken by God and effected through the Logos after the first creation and Fall. [ ... ] If, as opposed to Dionysius, angels and humans are for Origen of one fundamental nature, and if the instruction given is intended to lead them back and up to their originally uniform status, it nonetheless remains the case that for both writers the action and reflection of Providence in the world is anagogic; everything that it establishes is given to lead the soul back and up to γνῶσις<sup>36</sup>;

Evagrius provides us with a completely traditional spectrum of reason-endowed beings ranging from the angelic hosts, through humankind, and down to the

legions of hell. The doctrine of original and final equality rules out, however, any notion of permanent diversity. The Providence of Christ is provisional, and so are the structures he has created for our edification. [ ... ] They are the reflection of states of being rather than of abiding differences in essence. His τάξεις, the ranks and distinctions proper to the secondary world, are therefore purely functional. They do not reveal the original will or intentions of God with regard to each—i.e. the creative λόγοι—as they do in Dionysius, but instead teach the temporary, pedagogic intent of Christ's Providence. They are to be ascended [ ... ] as steps on the way back to the original γνῶσις<sup>37</sup>.

## The *sine qua non* of Spiritual Ascent: Sonship and Eldership

For Clement, oral transmission within the framework of spiritual discipleship is, clearly, the ideal mode of training in faith (Strom. 1.13.2, 4 [SC 30:52, 53]). 'Studying to be a god' takes places in the context of such discipleship. And since we are talking ultimately about a process of angelification, this discipleship consists in receiving the guidance of those angels lowest on the hierarchy and closest to humans. Clement sees them at work in theophanies, in prophetic inspiration, in the providential gift to the Greek and Barbarian philosophers, in guiding the embodiment of souls (Proph. Ecl. 50.1: angels even 'manipulate' the erotic impulse which leads to procreation!), in the disembodiment upon death, and in the continued spiritual growth after death (Proph. Ecl. 41.1).

The ascetic struggle is assisted by those *isangelic* Gnostics who live among humans, but are—literally, for Clement—angels in the body. To conclude, then, for Clement 'studying to be a god' requires submission to an ascetic programme designed to bring about the 'angelification' of the devotee, under the guidance of a teacher who has himself advanced on this transformational path, and who has been divinely entrusted with the instruction of 'those among humans who are transformed into angels.' Such a Gnostic teacher follows the pattern established by the incarnate Logos and 'mediates contact and fellowship with the divinity' (Strom. 7.9.52.1 [SC 428:174]). Therefore, by appropriating 'the contemplation that leads to improvement' from a trusted Gnostic teacher, one is integrated into the hierarchy which channels the Logos to the lowest level of existence. Eldership and discipleship are thus *sine qua non* conditions for the spiritual ascent of the believer.

## IN GUISE OF CONCLUSIONS: MYSTAGOGY, SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY, AND SCHOLARLY LOOTERS

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Both Alexandrians are speak about the revelational and mystagogical character of their writing. Philo insists, throughout his many writings, on topics such as secret oral traditions protected by silence from the ignorant masses and revealed gradually to

those willing and able to be initiated<sup>38</sup>. Clement, too, claims to be the privileged heir and transmitter of earlier traditions from some ‘blessed men’ (Strom. 1.1.11.1 [SC 30:50]) whose ‘vigorous and animated discourses’ were, he says, ‘full of grace’ (Strom. 1.1.14.1 [SC 30:53]) but strictly oral. He views his own task, then, as that of giving written form to the precious traditions inherited from those charismatic teachers (Proph. Ecl. 27.1–7; cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, EH 6.13.9). Since ‘secret things are entrusted to speech, not to writing ... the mysteries are delivered mystically’ (Strom. 1.1.13.2, 4 [SC 30:52, 53]), his written accounts are intrinsically obscure; far from dispelling the cloud of ambiguity, Clement announces that he will add a second layer of obscurity, justified by pastoral concern for those who might be harmed by a more direct exposition of the truth (Strom. 1.1.14.3–15.1 [SC 30:54]), but also on account of those who ‘have the daring to pilfer and steal the ripe fruits’ (Strom. 7.18.11.1 [SC 428:330]).

Since he views Christian doctrine as divine revelation, dispensed pedagogically by the Logos in order to be appropriated mystagogically, and the teaching activity of the Gnostic as mirroring that of the Logos, we may assume that Clement has high expectations of his readers. To be more precise, Clement expects his readers to place themselves within the theological, ascetical, and liturgical interpretive context of the hierarchy reaching from the heavenly liturgy of the *protocists* all the way down to the humble life of the local parish, and to allow the Alexandrian master’s writings to guide them towards an increasingly transformative, perpetually ascensional, mystagogical experience of the incarnate Logos.

Clement’s theological vision found a worthy continuator in the anonymous author of the *Areopagitica*, for whom ‘the hidden truth about the celestial intelligences’ is deliberately revealed only through symbols and thereby concealed from the many, in accordance to ‘a basic fact of the spiritual life: there are degrees of knowledge, of receptivity to truth, and of advancement in it’<sup>39</sup>.

Dionysius presents his account not only as a matter of tradition (‘thus he taught me, and I in turn impart it to thee’), but, more importantly, as a further step of adaptive ‘traditioning’ of the divine revelation received by angelic mediation, according to the principle of ‘learning from another—God indeed giving the word and angels mediating it (προξενούντων)—and then revealing to us who love the angels, φιλαγγέλους’ (CH 13.4 [308B]). Those who are thus incorporated into the hierarchy, to benefit from ‘every good gift and every perfect gift ... coming down from the father of lights’ (James 1:17), are rightly called φιλάγγελοι, friends of the angels.

With this, we have both an oblique self-description and the icon of Dionysius’ ideal reader. It has been noted that the very practice of writing under a pseudonym is ‘integral to the ascetic and mystical enterprise described in the *CD*, a devotional practice aiming at refashioning oneself into the New Testament Dionysius, as an ‘imitator of Paul’ (Gal. 4:16), and seeking, like the Apostle, to share his own self with Christ (Gal. 2:20) by rendering his own self ‘cleft open, split, doubled, and thereby deified’<sup>40</sup>. More precisely, ‘like the ecstatic God with whom he seeks to suffer union, as a writer he simultaneously remains where he is and stretches outside himself’ and, like Moses on Sinai, he is (MT 1.3) ‘neither oneself nor someone else’<sup>41</sup>.

Needless to say, a scholar reads neither Dionysius nor his Alexandrian predecessors, Philo and Clement, as a φιλάγγελος aspiring to ἰσαγγελία. Our approach is, rather, one that maintains a critical distance to the text, neglecting the theological, ascetical, and liturgical interpretive context that would make possible the reader's dynamic assimilation of the writer's theological mystagogy. The ancients we have consulted would have deemed the academic study of Philonic, Clementine, or Areopagitic texts illegitimate because it is not an act of participation in the formative programme described by those very texts. We are, in fact, just the kind of looters Clement feared: thieves 'that have the daring to pilfer and steal the ripe fruits'. Grasping this point is crucial to understanding our sources.

## NOTES

1. Golitzin 1994, 415–416
2. Golitzin 1994, 253
3. Knauber 1968; Wagner 1971; Bucur 2015
4. Bradshaw 2014, 120–121
5. Golitzin 1994, 258
6. Spec. 1.49 [LCL 320:126]; discussion in Bradshaw 2014, 63–64
7. Pépin, 378–379; Termini 2000; Hägg, 239–240; 246–251; 260–267
8. Lilla 1971, 212; references at 199 n. 6
9. Lilla 1971, 212–226; see also Mortley 1973, 5–25
10. Pépin 1964, 378–379; Termini 2000; Hägg 2006, 239–240 on Philo and 246–251, 260–267 on Clement
11. Hägg 2006, 261
12. Hägg 2006, 267–268
13. Golitzin 1994, 261
14. Le Boulluec 1981, 245–247; Rizzerio 1998
15. Segal 1977; Fossum 1985; Hurtado 2003; Boyarin 2001; Boyarin 2004
16. Termini 2009, 101
17. Boyarin 2001, 250 = Boyarin 2004, 114
18. Boyarin 2001, 249 = Boyarin 2004, 113
19. Segal 1977, 173
20. Segal 1977, ix
21. Osborn 2005, 150
22. Lilla 1971, 204
23. Golitzin 1994, 105
24. Golitzin 1994, 63, 66; Bucur 2008, 201–203
25. Bucur 2015, 9
26. Roques 1983, 131
27. Osborn 1957, 158; emphasis added
28. Riedinger 1962
29. Golitzin 1994, 261–269, esp. 265; Bucur 2009, 32–35
30. Collomp 1913; Bousset 1915; Kretschmar 1956; Daniélou 1962
31. Daniélou 1962, 214

32. Bucur 2009
33. Golitzin 2001, 141
34. Nardi 1995, 19
35. Daniélou 1962, 207
36. Golitzin 1994, 276
37. Golitzin 1994, 327
38. See the comprehensive list of references in Yli-Karjanmaa 2015, 247
39. Golitzin 1994, 153 = Golitzin 2013, 207, discussing CH 2.2 [140B]; cf. EH 1.4 [376C]
40. Stang 2012, 22–23
41. Stang 2012, 18, 21, 22

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## CHAPTER 7

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# ORIGEN, EVAGRIUS, AND DIONYSIUS

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ILARIA L.E. RAMELLI

DIONYSIUS seems to have been a Christian Platonist,<sup>1</sup> indebted not only to ‘pagan’ Platonists such as Plotinus and especially Proclus, but also to Christians such as Origen and Evagrius. Typically, Dionysius—like Origen—conflates Plato and Scripture: for instance, he applies ἀνάμνησις to both Jesus’ Eucharistic command and Plato’s reminiscence doctrine. In *Divine Names* 1.8 he cites 1 Timothy 6:20 with the addition of καλέ to ‘Timothy’—drawn from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where Socrates addresses a ‘fair youth’. Likewise, in *Epistle* 8.6, Jesus appears ‘on the ridge of heaven’, an expression borrowed from *Phaedrus* 247b–c 247BC; his throne is ὑπερουράνιος, like Plato’s ὑπερουράνιος.<sup>2</sup>

## HIEROTHEUS AND ORIGEN’S LEGACY

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The present essay argues that Dionysius is a true Origenian, deeply indebted to the actual teaching of Origen, rather than an ‘Origenist’, holding the doctrines that were denounced as heresies in the sixth century. Hence he should be contrasted with the Syriac writer Stephen Bar Sudhaili (late fifth century) whose *Book of Hierotheus* ascribes his own Origenism (which we might also style an extreme Evagrianism)<sup>3</sup> to the otherwise unknown man whom Dionysius names as his teacher. Indeed Sudhaili has often been regarded as an inspiration to Dionysius; for Rosemary Arthur,<sup>4</sup> the latter’s *Celestial Hierarchy* responded to *Hierotheus*, which Dionysius deemed too radically Evagrian. Andrew Louth (2009) deems *Hierotheus* later than the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, which Sudhaili knew and by which he was inspired (also in the choice of apostolic pseudonyms). István Perczel (2011) suggested that Stephen is the ‘brother Mor Stephen’ mentioned in Sergius of Reshaina’s introduction to his sixth century Syriac translation of the *Corpus*, which reads the *Corpus* in the light of Evagrius; Sergius wishes him to enjoy apokatastasis—a doctrine shared by Origen, Nyssen, Evagrius, and likely Dionysius (Ramelli 2013). Sergius, a disciple of the Neoplatonist Ammonios Hermeiou (435/445–517/426), was acquainted with Origen’s ideas, as is also attested by Ps. Zacharias, *Chronicle* 9.19.

This essay does not address the relation between the Greek and the Syriac *Corpus*, possibly based on an earlier/different Greek *Vorlage*. A similar problem is found with other Origenian works: Evagrius's *Kephalaia Gnostika*, with two Syriac redactions, their reciprocal relation and connection with the Greek fragments (Ramelli 2015; 2017c), and the *Dialogue of Adamantius* and the priority of Rufinus' Latin over the extant Greek.<sup>5</sup> Dionysius, in Greek, emerges as a profoundly Origenian thinker, more than radically Origenistic.

Hierotheus is presented by Dionysius as his own teacher,<sup>6</sup> superior to all Christian sages after the apostles (DN 3.2). This recalls Didymus' and Jerome's fourth-century description of Origen: was Hierotheus for Dionysius a counterpart of Origen? Dionysius quotes two excerpts from works by Hierotheus (DN 2.9–10; 4.15–17). The first is from Hierotheus' Θεολογικαὶ στοιχειώσεις, a *pendant* to the allegedly lost Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις (ΘΥ), or *Outlines of Theology*, by Dionysius. The second is from Hierotheus' Ἑρωτικοὶ ὕμνοι. The Ἑρωτικοὶ ὕμνοι might conceal a reference to Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*—which Dionysius knew well—and the Θεολογικαὶ στοιχειώσεις/ὑποτυπώσεις to Origen's Περὶ Ἀρχῶν (discussed later).

Dionysius portrays Hierotheus as a sublime theologian and mystic, παθὼν τὰ θεῖα, whose writings are a 'second Scripture' (δεύτερα λόγια, again fitting well with Origen's inspired exegesis and the hyperbolic praise by Jerome). Dionysius claims that he was taught by Hierotheus—'holy God' might point to the divine inspiration of his own writings. Hierotheus's first excerpt treats Christ-Logos, who maintains the harmony of parts and whole, being above both, in terms that resemble Origen's theology.<sup>7</sup> The second expounds the gradation of love, whose different forms and powers are reduced to unity: love is a unifying force that moves all, from the Good to the last of beings (πρόοδος) and from the last to the Good (ἐπιστροφή). This, we shall see, might refer to Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.

Dionysius affirms that his works are but explications of Hierotheus' esoteric teaching (DN 3.2–3). Clement likewise explained Pantaenus, Plotinus Ammonius, Origen too in his 'Ammonian' treatises, and Didymus Origen. Dionysius' reference to Hierotheus as a contemporary of the apostles parallels his own pseudonymity of Athenian philosopher converted by Paul after his Areopagus speech.<sup>8</sup> Paul's speech inspired Patristic philosophy, beginning with Justin, who programmatically alluded to it (*Second Apology* 10.6).<sup>9</sup> Dionysius—like Paul and Origen, his inspirers—intended to apply the riches of Greek metaphysics to Christian philosophical theology. The Greeks received from God the true philosophy, leading to the knowledge of God, and lost it in polytheism (Rom. 1:20–25), but philosophers could recover it. This reflects the line of Justin, Clement, Origen, and subsequent Patristic philosophers.

## LOVE AND APOKATASTASIS

Dionysius is probably an *Origenian* Platonist; from Origen's and Nyssen's apophaticism he derived his own.<sup>10</sup> There are even verbal borrowings from Nyssen<sup>11</sup> and Origen (e.g. μὴνὰς καὶ ἑνὰς), and theological ones. In a passage concerning ecstasy (*Mystical Theology*

1.1), Dionysius inserted a quotation (πάντα ἀφελών) from Plotinus (ἄφελε πάντα, *Ennead.* 5.3.17), who inspired Nyssen too in this respect (see Ramelli 2014a). Dionysius maintained that rational creatures will be united to God in the end, and there are hints that he supported the apokatastasis theory, like Clement, Origen, Nyssen, Evagrius, and Proclus, from whom he inherited the tenet of the ontological non-subsistence of evil and the μονή-πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή scheme.<sup>12</sup> Dionysius, like Eriugena—who read Dionysius with the scholia of John of Scythopolis and Maximus—and like late Neoplatonists, dovetailed ἐπιστροφή and apokatastasis.<sup>13</sup> Apokatastasis for Dionysius coincides with the culmination of the third movement, the ἐπιστροφή of all beings to their Cause:

The Cause of All is all in all, according to the Biblical saying [κατὰ τὸ λόγιον],<sup>14</sup> and certainly must be praised because it is the Giver of existence to all, the Originator of all beings, who *brings all to perfection* [τελειωτική], holding together and protecting them; their seat, which *has them all return to itself* [πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρεπτική], and this in a unified, *irresistible*, absolute [ἀσχέτως], and transcendent way (DN 1.7.596c–597a).

God is ‘the Cause of the *perfecting* [τελείωσις] of all beings ... has pre-taken in itself all beings with the perfect acts of goodness of its *providence*, which is the cause of all’.

All beings are perfected by God, will return to God, and God’s goodness and providence are the cause of all. This is consistent with apokatastasis; Dionysius points to the eschatological παλιγγενεσία<sup>15</sup> and uses apokatastasis terminology. Like Evagrius,<sup>16</sup> he played on the astronomical meaning of ἀποκατάστασις to allegorize the restoration (DN 146.19 Suchla): the return of heavenly bodies is decided by God–Good, symbolized by the sun, with a reminiscence of Plato, but also of Origen’s insistence on Christ–God as Sun of Justice.<sup>17</sup> The apokatastasis of the stars allegorizes the eventual apokatastasis, also provided by God: the sun represents God–Good and stars rational creatures, who participate in the Good. God’s power proceeds down to all beings, to preserve them by leading them to their own good, keep angels uncontaminated, order apokatastasis,<sup>18</sup> and offer deification by grace to the ἐκθεούμενοι. Here too, astronomical apokatastasis—mentioned between the idea of the angels, preserved uncontaminated, and that of the θέωσις of rational creatures—allegorizes the restoration of rational creatures.

Dionysius dovetailed the Neoplatonic movement of ἐπιστροφή, after μονή and πρόοδος, with ἀποκατάστασις, in at least two passages. In *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (EH) 82.17 and 83.7 the movement of the priest from the altar to the extremities of the church and back is assimilated to the divine movements of πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή. For this ἐπιστροφή, the terminology of apokatastasis is used: πάλιν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τελειωτικῶς ἀποκαθιστάμενον, in reference to the return to the altar (EH 82.17), and εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν ἀμειώτως ἀποκαθίσταται, in reference to the spiritual interpretation of this return (EH 83.7). Apokatastasis is the return to the Monad and unification (εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν μονάδα συνάγεται καὶ ἐνοποιεῖ τοὺς ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἱερῶς ἀναγομένους); the application of the terminology of *oikeiōsis* to the notion of apokatastasis is inherited from Origen and Nyssen.<sup>19</sup> In DN 4.14 (160.15), the metaphysical movement of ἐπιστροφή (εἰς

τάγαθὸν ἐπιστρεφομένην), after that of πρόοδος (ἀγαθὴν πρόοδον), is identified with ἀποκατάστασις. The terminology of apokatastasis is employed for ἐπιστροφή: God's love forms a circle that proceeds from the Good (God being 'Beauty and Good itself', as in Nyssen<sup>20</sup>) and returns to the Good; it 'always proceeds, remains, and returns to the same' Good (κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ προϊὼν αἰεὶ καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος). This doctrine Dionysius ascribes to Hierotheus in his *Hymns on Love*:

The only one who is *Beauty and Good per se* [μόνον αὐτὸ δι' ἑαυτὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν] is the manifestation, so to say, of itself through itself, the good procession [πρόοδον] of the transcendent unity, and simple movement of love, self-moving, self-operating, proceeding in the Good and gushing out from the Good to the beings and *returning again to the Good* [αἰθὶς εἰς τάγαθόν ἐπιστρεφομένην]. In this the divine love exceptionally clearly shows its own lack of an end and a beginning [τὸ ἀτελεῦτητον ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἀναρχὸν ὁ θεὸς ἔρωσ], like a kind of *infinite and absolutely eternal circle for the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and toward the Good* [τις αἰδῖος κύκλος διὰ τάγαθόν, ἐκ τάγαθοῦ καὶ ἐν τάγαθῳ καὶ εἰς τάγαθόν], proceeding around in an introversive non-wandering spiral, always proceeding, remaining, and *returning* [lit. *being restored*] in the same movement and the same way [κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ προϊὼν αἰεὶ καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος]. These truths were also explained, in his *divinely inspired exegesis* [ἐνθέως ὑφηγήσατο], by my illustrious and holy initiator in his *Hymns on Love* [κατὰ τοὺς ἐρωτικούς ὕμνους]. It will be particularly appropriate to quote from these Hymns and thus provide my own discourse on love with a sacred introduction, as it were: 'Love [Τὸν ἔρωτα], be it divine or angelic or intellectual or psychic/animal or physical, should be understood as a unitive force that gathers together . . . [ἐνωτικὴν τίνα καὶ συγκρατικὴν ἐννοήσωμεν δύναμιν . . .]'

The inspired exegete Hierotheus points to Origen: Dionysius is paraphrasing the initial sections of Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (he paraphrases Origen also elsewhere),<sup>21</sup> so one may wonder whether these ἐρωτικοὶ ὕμνοι indicate Origen's commentary.<sup>22</sup> Origen used ἔρωσ—reworking its Platonic meaning—besides ἀγάπη to refer to God's love, and conceived it as a unifying force, exactly as 'Hierotheus'.<sup>23</sup> Origen insisted that besides *carnalis amor/Cupido*, the *interior homo* possesses *spiritalis amor* (ἔρωσ, *C.Cant.* prol.2.16). To Origen and Nyssen likely refers DN 4.12: 'the theologians' treated ἀγάπη and ἔρωσ as synonyms (see Ramelli 2014c); this is why Dionysius ascribes ἔρωσ to the Divinity in DN 4.10. But God's ἔρωσ must be distinguished from the divided, physical, and partial ἔρωσ, an empty image of true ἔρωσ (DN 4.12.709BC): again, the same proviso as Origen's in *C.Cant.* Dionysius remarks that some Christian writers on sacred matters have regarded the title ἔρωσ as even more divine than ἀγάπη (ibidem): Gregory claimed that ἔρωσ is a more intense form of ἀγάπη (*H.Cant.* 13, GNO 6.383.9). Indeed, Origen's influence regarding the concept of divine love not only as ἀγάπη, but also as ἔρωσ is also evident in Patristic thinkers who followed him, such as Nyssen and Methodius (see Ramelli 2014c).

Moreover, when Dionysius cites Ignatius to justify his bold application of ἔρωσ terminology to divine love (DN 4.12), he is repeating Origen's move, again in his commentary on the Song of Songs:

Non ergo interest utrum amari [ἐρᾶσθαι] dicatur Deus aut diligī [ἀγαπᾶσθαι], nec puto quod culpārī possit si quis Deum, sicut Iohannes caritatem [ἀγάπη], ita ipse amorem [ἔρως] nominet. Denique memini aliquem sanctorum dixisse, Ignatium nomine, de Christo: Meus autem amor [ἔρως] crucifixus est (*C.Cant. prol.2.36*).

Not only the application of ἔρως to God, but also apokatastasis can be ascribed to Origen under the name of ‘Hierotheus’, and even the *joining* of both doctrines, which is also Origen’s.<sup>24</sup> In DN 4.10.708AB Dionysius connects again love and apokatastasis. He describes God, Beauty–Good, as ἐραστόν and ἀγαπητόν and declares that ‘the Cause of all beings loves all beings in the superabundance of its goodness’, because of which God creates all, perfects all, keeps all together, and restores all. ‘Divine love [θεῖος ἔρως] is Good seeking Good for the sake of Good’. Therefore the ‘endless circle’ of ἔρως (DN 4.14–15.712D–713AB, analyzed earlier), moves ‘through the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and to the Good’, in a movement of *monē–proodos–epistrophē* that becomes *monē–proodos–apokatastasis*: ‘always proceeding, remaining, and being restored to itself’. Here Dionysius introduces Hierotheus’ definition of Eros, as seen: that Hierotheus conceals Origen is further suggested by the connection between love, unity, and reversion/restoration.

Dionysius also appropriated the concept, dear to Origen and Nyssen, of *anastasis* as apokatastasis: the resurrection as a holistic restoration, not only physical, but also spiritual; thus the resurrection will be ‘most complete/perfect’: ‘She sanctifies the whole human being [τὸν ὅλον ἄνθρωπον, *sc.* body and soul, mentioned immediately beforehand] and sacredly performs *its holistic salvation* [τὴν ὀλικὴν αὐτοῦ σωτηρίαν ἱεουργοῦσα], and announces that *its resurrection will be most complete*’ (τελειωτάτην αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀνάστασιν, MT 7.9.130H–R). The resurrection is complete if it entails spiritual restoration. Evagrius’ influence on Dionysius’ notion of holistic salvation is palpable; Evagrius’ threefold resurrection of body, soul, and *nous* came in turn from Origen and Nyssen (see Ramelli 2017c).

DN 4.23–26 indicates the ontological premises of universal restoration to God. Given the ontological non-subsistence of evil, which does not exist but is an ἔλλειψις, Dionysius demonstrates that no creature is evil by nature—as Origen argued against Gnosticism. Even demons, if evil by nature, would not stem from the Good, and therefore would not exist. Rather, they possess a ‘good essence’ (ἀγαθὴν οὐσίαν) and are good insofar as they exist. They have become evil since ‘they have ceased to possess and exert the divine goods’. Evil is a perversion (παράτροπή) of their nature. But evil is unstable (ἄστατον) and cannot endure forever: this is a heritage of Nyssen’s theory of the finitude and instability of evil (Ramelli 2013a: 394–395). For stability is a characteristic of the Good alone (τὸ γὰρ αἰεὶ ταῦτόν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἴδιον), as Origen theorized. Therefore, sinners will not be such forever, nor will they cease to exist—a tenet of Origen, again, who used it in his argument against the ontological destruction of the devil.<sup>25</sup>

Dionysius mentions the prayer for the dead, for the remission of sins and paradise (MT 7.4, 125H–R<sup>26</sup>); here God is repeatedly called θεαρχικὴ ἀγαθότης. Notably, in Dionysius the Trinity is θεαρχία and θεαρχικὴ ἀγαθότης, expressions likely inspired by Origen’s God



as three ἀρχαί or ἀρχικὴ τριάς and God as supreme ἀγαθότης.<sup>27</sup> This ἀγαθότης/*bonitas* is the agent of restoration for Origen, Augustine, and other supporters of apokatastasis (Ramelli 2013b). Dionysius warns that ‘everyone will receive what he deserves’, therefore the priest must not pray for the wicked that they may not receive what they deserve (EH 7.3). But the retribution of sins ‘up to the last coin’ was admitted by supporters of apokatastasis, such as Origen and Nyssen: after retribution, apokatastasis can take place. Dionysius refutes that ‘weakness should not be punished but forgiven’ (DN 4.35) by arguing that everyone has received free will from God. But here, too, Dionysius follows Origen, who thought that each one has free will and must experience the consequences of its use, good or bad: this does not exclude the eventual universal restoration.

A terminological analysis reveals<sup>28</sup> that in the *Corpus* the Platonic vocabulary is superimposed on the biblical one. Dionysius notices that in Scripture αἰώνιος does not always mean ‘eternal’: ‘in Scripture sometimes there is mention of an αἰών in time and an αἰώνιος time’; here αἰών/αἰώνιος refers to a distant time, remote, or indeterminate, long, but not eternal: ‘therefore, one must not consider things called αἰώνια in Scripture to be simply *coeternal with God* [συναιδία θεῶ], who is rather prior to every αἰών’ (216.14)—as Origen argued. That things αἰώνια are not coeternal with God will be taken over by Eriugena.<sup>29</sup> Like Origen and Didymus,<sup>30</sup> Dionysius is fully conscious of the multiplicity of meanings attached to αἰώνιος in Scripture; if the Bible speaks of αἰώνιον punishment and fire, this does not mean that they are ‘eternal’.

## GOD, HUMANITY, AND THE RESTORATION: ARGUMENTS FOR ORIGEN’S FURTHER PRESENCE IN DIONYSIUS

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István Perczel situated the *Corpus* within fifth-century Origenism (Perczel 2001b) and Evagrianism (Perczel 1999b). This strengthens the suspicion, for which the present chapter argues, that ‘Hierotheus’ and his *Hymns on Love* might allude to Origen and his work. The definition of God ‘Monad and Henad’ (DN 1.4) derives, not from Proclus, but from Origen (Perczel 2003). Proclus never joins Monad and Henad in reference to the First Principle, what Origen does in *Princ.* 1.1.6, defining God as ‘μονάς and ἐνάς’ (preserved in Greek by Rufinus). Origen called Henad the union of Father and Son (*Dialogue with Heraclides* 4.4). Origen’s God–μονάς–ἐνάς is reflected in Origen’s followers: Eusebius,<sup>31</sup> Evagrius,<sup>32</sup> and Didymus(?) *De Trinitate*, 1.15; 2.8.1. Origen, in turn, derived his idea of God as Monad–Henad from Numenius,<sup>33</sup> whose influence on his thought is attested by Porphyry.<sup>34</sup> Numenius absorbed the Pythagorean notion of God as ‘Monad’ (F52: *singularitas*), μία, and μονή (F2).

Remarkably, Dionysius’s Origenian passage on God–Monad–Henad develops the doctrine of apokatastasis as restoration to unity and to the image and likeness of God, as Origen and Nyssen understood it. Dionysius here telescopes Origen’s stages of



image-likeness-unity (see Ramelli 2013c). If Dionysius speaks in the present, as he often does, it is because God is beyond time:

You will find, so to say, that the whole *hymnology of the theologians* prepares the *divine names* in a revelatory and hymnic way according to the beneficent *procession of the principle of the divinity*. For this reason, practically in the whole *theological doctrine* we see the principle of the divinity celebrated as *Monad and Henad* [μονὰς καὶ ἐνὰς], because of the simplicity and unity of its supernatural indivisibility, by which we are unified as by a unifying power, and by a *supermundane act of reunion of our divisible alterities* we are assembled in a *monad that is an image of God* [θεοειδής] and in a union that is in the likeness of God [θεομίμητος] (DN 1.4).

‘Divine names’ refers to Origen’s systematic study of Christ’s *epinoiai* in his *Commentary on John*. The very concept of ‘the hymnology of the theologians’ is Origenian: Origen introduced the equivalence between ‘hymns’ and ‘theology’.<sup>35</sup> This, God as ‘Monad and Henad’, and the allusion to apokatastasis as unity place this passage in Origen’s line. The ‘theologians’ who expressed themselves in ‘hymns’ points to Origen primarily, also for the clue provided by ‘μονὰς καὶ ἐνὰς’—a quotation from Origen (*First Principles* 1.1), implying that ‘the theological doctrine’ is the Origenian doctrine—and for the implicit link with the author of the *Hymns on Love*, Hierotheus, who might be a counterpart of Origen with his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.

Origen called *unitas*–ἐνὰς also the original unity of creation (*Princ.* 2.1.1), a notion developed by Evagrius (Ramelli 2017a), and in the Dionysian passage the Henad is applied precisely to the original unity, later restored in the eventual apokatastasis, according to the (Origenian and Plotinian) assimilation of ἀρχή and τέλος, reflected in the movements of μονή–πρόοδος–ἐπιστροφή. God’s unifying power will restore humans to unity and the image and likeness of God, as they were created in the beginning (Gen. 1:26). The creatural Monad and Henad will be like God’s Monad and Henad.

The ‘unifying power’ through which the divinity operates is the νοῦς, a unifying power in Evagrius (Ramelli 2017a), who theorized the subsumption of body into soul into νοῦς that Eriugena rightly traced back to Nyssen (Ramelli 2018b). Dionysius knew Origen, Nyssen, and Evagrius. That the unifying power is the νοῦς results from DN 7.2, where the νοερά δύναμις is indivisible, image of God, and effects unity. Such unifying power unifies the soul by restoring it to its original state of image and likeness of God through the ‘reunion of our divisible alterities’, that is, in Platonic language, of all the corporeal qualities and the movements of the souls related to them. This is the process explained by Nyssen in *De anima*, and the unifying role of νοῦς in Evagrius’ system. In this Christian context, the intellectual unifying power coincides with Christ–Logos–Nous, who is also the unifying agent in John 11:52 and 17:11.21–23.<sup>36</sup> Origen read these passages precisely in reference to the eventual apokatastasis (*Princ.* 3.5.4). Dionysius, commenting on the *epinoia* ‘Peace’—stressed by Origen in *C.Cant.* prol.4.20, where Solomon *Pacificus* is Christ at apokatastasis<sup>37</sup>—describes him as ‘the only universal Principle and Cause who, superior to all beings in indivisibility, determines and limits all, with keys that hold together the various separate beings’.

Christ is the unifying νοῦς, who ‘*unifies* the many alterities and makes us *perfect* in the *divine life* that is an image of the Henad [εἰς ἐνοειδῆ καὶ θεῖαν ἀποτελειώσας ζώην]’ (EH 1.1). This recalls DN 1.4, where God is μονάς καὶ ἐνός and humans participate in God’s light in the *telos*, thanks to an impassible and immaterial *nous* in a union that transcends every intellection with an effusion of ultra-brilliant rays. This describes apokatastasis as ἔνωσις, as in Origen and Evagrius. In Sergius’ Syriac translation, ἔνωσις is a ‘fusion/confusion’, a description of apokatastasis in the form condemned in the 553 Constantinople Council, Anathema 14, which echoes KG 2.17.<sup>38</sup> It may indeed be Origen and his tradition that DN 1.4 calls ‘the theological tradition’.

## GOD AS ALL IN ALL: ORIGEN, NYSSSEN, EVAGRIUS, AND DIONYSIUS

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God ‘redeems from πάθος, weakness, and lack ... as a Father, has compassion for the weakness and redeems from evil ... restores to beauty even the good that was lost’ (DN 7.204 Suchla); God–Good ‘restores creatures from evil to the Good’, ‘fills’ the lack (evil), and ‘orders’ the disorder that evil produces. This idea is close to that of (the still Origenian) Augustine: *Dei bonitas omnia deficientia sic ordinat donec ad id recurrant unde defecerunt*.<sup>39</sup> Both Dionysius and Augustine describe apokatastasis as present because God is beyond time, always redeems creatures from evil, now and in the end.

Dionysius states that he wrote extensively about the universal peace and restoration foreseen from eternity and occurring when God will be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28), in ΘΥ, which, according to DN 1.1, preceded DN:

What could be said of Christ’s love for humanity? Jesus operates *all in all* [τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι ἐνεργούντος] and *effects an unspeakable peace* [ποιούντος εἰρήνην ἄρρητον] *established from eternity* [ἐξ αἰῶνος προωρισμένην]; *reconciles* us to him [ἀποκαταλλάσσοντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ] in spirit, and, *through himself and in himself, to the Father* [δι’ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ τῷ πατρί]. Of these wonderful gifts I abundantly spoke [ικανῶς εἴρηται] in the *Theological Outlines*, where our testimony is joined to that of the holy inspiration of Scriptures/the sages [λογίων] (DN 11.5.221 Suchla).

The reference to 1 Cor. 15:28—Origen’s, Nyssen’s, and Evagrius’ favourite biblical support for apokatastasis—indicates that Dionysius treated apokatastasis in terms close to those of Nyssen’s *Tunc et Ipse* on 1 Cor. 15:28.<sup>40</sup> Like Origen, Nyssen, and Evagrius, he supported this doctrine through scriptural quotations and interpretations. Λογίων derives from λόγια, ‘Scriptures’, and/or λόγιοι, ‘theologians’, especially Origen, Nyssen, and Evagrius. Λόγιον, ‘sacred utterance’, meant ‘oracular response/utterance’; by the fifth century, τὰ λόγια described the *Chaldean Oracles* dear to Neoplatonists (Addey 2014: 7). Dionysius, by using λογίων, was opposing Scriptures and Christian Platonism (Origen and followers) to the *Chaldaean Oracles* and their use in ‘pagan’ Platonism.

Dionysius states he had thoroughly treated these Origenian themes in a whole work. Dionysius relates the situation described in 1 Cor. 15:28, God ‘all in all’, both to ‘God’s providence’ and to ‘the salvation of all’: ‘in his providence, God is close to every being’, assisting each until the *telos*, and thus ‘becomes “all in all”’. This is ἡ πάντων σωτηρία, the preservation and eventual salvation of all beings. God’s activity is timeless: the *telos* will be a passage to timelessness for all creation. Then evil will be reduced to nothing, that is, its ontological nature—again, a strong tenet of Origen, Nyssen, and Evagrius (KG 1.40–41).<sup>41</sup>

Dionysius echoes Paul’s 1 Cor. 15:28 in DN 7.3 and 1.7, which confirms his Christian, Origenian orientation. Paul was a major inspiration to Origen, and 1 Cor. 15:28 most of all. Dionysius then likely supported apokatastasis, upheld by Origen and Paul himself,<sup>42</sup> in passages that Origen, Nyssen, and others, including Dionysius, referred to apokatastasis.

The title Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις (ΘΥ), *Outlines of Theology*, appears six times in DN and three in MT. In DN 1.1, Dionysius declares that he wrote DN ‘shortly after the ΘΥ’. Then, he claims that ΘΥ discussed the transcendence and ineffability of God (116.7 Suchla), called αὐτοαγαθόν—as Origen called the Father. Origen and Plotinus followed Numenius here (Ramelli 2012b). Dionysius in ΘΥ presented the Trinity as triune Unity (like Nyssen, he ascribed the characteristics of Plotinus’ One to the whole Trinity): ‘as I said while expounding the ΘΥ, the One, the unknown, who is beyond Being and is the Good itself [αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν], that is, the triune Henad [τριαδικὴ Ἑνάς], which is all divine and good likewise, is both ineffable and impossible to conceive’. Apophaticism is a direct heritage of Origen, Plotinus, Nyssen, and Evagrius,<sup>43</sup> with the language of Plato’s *Timaeus* concerning God.

Dionysius states that the ΘΥ explained that God’s names must be ascribed to the three Persons indivisibly, since the Trinity is the Superunited Henad (ἡ ὑπερηνωμένη ἑνάς, DN 122.11), and the ΘΥ described God–Trinity as transcending Being—as in Origen,<sup>44</sup> and like Plotinus’ One—and the Good itself and as the cause of Being and of all goods (DN 125.14).<sup>45</sup> Like Nyssen, Didymus applies to the whole Trinity what in Origen were mainly Christ’s *epinoiai*. The ΘΥ, indeed, explained the reasons for the distinction and unity among the Three Persons—what Origen clarified through the notion of hypostasis<sup>46</sup>—albeit within the limits of human knowledge (130.5).<sup>47</sup>

Dionysius also declares (DN 221.1), as mentioned, that he treated apokatastasis in ΘΥ—another prominent Origenian–Nyssian–Evagrian theme. For Dionysius here, as for Origen and Nyssen, apokatastasis rests on Christ and is Scripturally grounded in 1 Cor. 15:28, and Acts 3:21 on universal apokatastasis established by God ἅπ’ αἰῶνος, an idea retained by Dionysius. Like Origen and Nyssen, Dionysius also adduced other scriptural and Patristic supports.

Dionysius also informs that in ΘΥ he discussed the main points of cataphatic theology, on the unity and trinity of God, the Persons of the Trinity, the generation of the Son, his assumption of humanity, etc., always basing himself on Scripture (MT 3.1, 146.1–9).<sup>48</sup> This is what Origen examined in *First Principles*. The ΘΥ were more concise (βραχυλογώτερα) than the *Symbolic Theology* because they proceeded from on

high and the beginning (ἄνω), from God–first Principle, down to creatures and their existence in time, until τὰ ἔσχατα, ‘the last things,’ probably to be understood also eschatologically.<sup>49</sup> ΘΥ began with God as first ἀρχή, like Origen in *First Principles*, and arrived, like him, at the eventual apokatastasis. Moreover, with the latter Dionysius dealt within the framework of theology and Christology, as in Nyssen’s *Tunc et ipse*. It is the investigation into the nature of God, insofar as possible, and into the ‘gifts of Christ’ that allows theologians to foresee what the ἔσχατα will be like for God’s creatures. Even in case ΘΥ never existed, Dionysius indicates their structure by echoing the structure of Origen’s masterpiece, including the treatment of eschatology. This is a further indication of Dionysius’ Origenian heritage. Moreover, Psellus cites the ΘΥ in the context of the evaluation of Origen’s thought (*Orations* 1.784), presenting it as belonging to the *Origenian* tradition.<sup>50</sup> Sergius in his introduction to his translation of the *Corpus*, ch. 117, mentions ΘΥ along with DN as the most important work by Dionysius, in that he discussed the highest science therein.<sup>51</sup>

Dionysius stresses that *Symbolic Theology* provided an allegorical exegesis of biblical anthropomorphisms: ‘the transpositions of sense-perceptible characteristics to the divine: the meaning of forms ascribed to God, shapes, bodily parts and organs attributed to God, places and worlds, episodes of anger, sorrow, rage . . . how curses should be understood . . . and all the other forms that have been attributed to God symbolically’. Origen explained biblical anthropomorphisms (God’s anger, threats, destructions . . .) in the same way as Dionysius, and reconciled them with the apokatastasis doctrine. Thus, Dionysius supported and assimilated Origen’s exegetical methodology (Ramelli 2021c, 2022c).

Remarkably, Dionysius also countered, we suspect, Porphyry’s criticism of Origen’s application of Greek allegoresis to Scripture (‘an absurdity’: ἀτοπία, *Contra Christianos* F39). But Dionysius claims that ‘uninitiated’, ἀτελέσι, deemed scriptural allegoresis—which clarifies ‘what the λόγια say about the divine mysteries’ in ‘riddles’—an ‘outstanding absurdity’ (ἀτοπίαν δεινὴν, Letter 9).

The *Corpus Dionysiacum* is Origenian. It presents the Origenian thought, including apokatastasis, as the true Christian philosophy—not in an *Origenistic*, radical form, as is the case with Sudhaili or post-Evagrian thought, but in an *Origenian* form, closer to the genuine philosophy–theology of Origen himself, who is a major presence behind the *Corpus* along with Nyssen and Evagrius, Origen’s followers.

## NOTES

1. Like others, Lankila 2017 parallels the Hierotheus–Dionysius relation to the Syrianus–Proclus one and views Dionysius as ‘crypto-pagan’, suggesting Agapius as identification. ‘Pagan’ Neoplatonists wished to preserve Proclus’ legacy giving it a faked Christian prehistory. Mainoldi 2017 deems Dionysius a Christian, who drew on Proclus and Damascius, but transformed them, with puns against ‘paganism’ (DN 11.6): God has nothing to do with ‘gods’.
2. Petroff 2017 argues that Dionysius received both a Christian and a Neoplatonic education, and wrote a corpus ‘deliberately referring at once to two different traditions’, Platonism and Christianity (256).

3. Piggéra 2002; Perczel 2009. See also my review of the latter volume in *Review of Biblical Literature* at [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7361\\_8021.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7361_8021.pdf).
4. Arthur 2008. Chs. 4–5.
5. Ramelli 2012–2013. My edition and commentary in preparation.
6. Louth 2001: 28–29; 102–103. Louth sees in Dionysius a Christian, a hypothesis already envisaged by Hausherr and Balthasar, and sees the *Caelestis Hierarchia* as a response to the *Book of Hierotheus*.
7. Argument in Ramelli 2021a.
8. Louth 2001: 10–11, observes that to Dionysius Athens meant philosophy, specifically Plato: by choosing the *persona* of Dionysius, the author intended to indicate that ‘the truths that Plato grasped belong to Christ’.
9. See Ramelli 2012a.
10. See, e.g. Des Places 1981; Carabine 1995; Turner 1995: 15–49; Rorem 2015, with an integrative reading of the whole *Corpus*; 7; the chapter on Nyssen in this volume.
11. E.g. θεοπλαστία (DN 2.9) from Nyssen’s θεόπλαστος (*Eccl.* GNO5.336).
12. On the centrality of this scheme especially in DN see Schäfer 2006.
13. Argument in Ramelli 2017b; further 2020. Research into apokatastasis in Platonism is underway.
14. 1 Cor. 15:28, Origen’s favourite passage in support of apokatastasis.
15. EH 7.1.1;3; 7.3.1. Παλιγγενεσία / πάλιν γίγνομαι was used by Marcus Aurelius (11.1.3), Simplicius (*Phys.* 886.12–13), and Alexander of Aphrodisias (*Gen. Corr.* 314.13–15).
16. As I argued extensively in my commentary in *Evagrius’ Kephalaia Gnostika* (Ramelli 2015).
17. Argument in Ramelli 2013c.
18. Διακρίνει μὲν ταῖς προόδοις, συνάγει δὲ ταῖς ἀποκαταστάσεσι: the Neoplatonic terminology of *proodos* and *epistrophé* is replaced by *proodos* and *apokatastasis*.
19. See Ramelli 2014b. Dionysius’ text is as follows: ‘In an inspired way one can see the priest, who holds the holy power, go from the divine altar to the most extreme parts of the temple [μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων τοῦ ἱεροῦ] with the perfume (of incense), and then *return back* [lit. *be restored*] *to the same altar, having fulfilled all to perfection* [πάλιν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τελειωτικῶς ἀποκαθιστάμενον]. Indeed, also God’s sovereign beatitude [θεαρχικὴ μακαριότης], which transcends all, even if, out of its divine goodness, it proceeds [πρόεισιν] to the communion of those holy creatures who participate in it [τῶν μετεχόντων αὐτῆς], nevertheless does not exit the immobile rest and stability that characterize its own nature [τῆς κατ’ οὐσίαν ἀκινήτου στάσεως καὶ ἰδρύσεως], and yet it shines forth in the very same way to all ... In the same way, the divine mystery of the office, although it has a single, simple, and unified principle [ἐνιαίαν καὶ ἀπλὴν ἔχουσα καὶ συνεπτυγμένην ἀρχὴν], multiplies itself into a sacred variety of symbols out of love for the human beings, and extends down to all the holy iconography, but from all this in turn *it gathers itself back into its own monad* in a unified way, and *unifies those who are led back up to itself* in a holy manner [αὐθις εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν μονάδα συνάγεται καὶ ἐνοποιεῖ τοὺς ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἱερῶς ἀναγομένους]. ... The priest is restored to his original principle [εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν ἀμειώτως ἀποκαθίσταται] without suffering any diminution, qua free and independent of his inferiors. And, having made his intellectual entrance into the One, he sees in a pure way the unitary *logoi* of the ceremonies celebrated, making *the goal and perfecting of the procession* [νοερὰν εἰσοδὸν] toward the second realities, dictated by love for human beings, *the divine return to the first realities* [τὴν εἰς τὰ πρῶτα θειοτέραν ἐπιστροφὴν ποιούμενος].’
20. Ramelli 2010a, translated into Greek by Ziakas 2016; Konstan 2014: 217, 218, 249 .

21. At the beginning of DN 2, Dionysius paraphrases *Princ.* 1.2.13: Perczel 1999a; 2000: 516–519; 2001. He also paraphrases a bit from Origen’s Commentary on John, and calls Origen ‘divine Bartholomew’.
22. See Ramelli 2013a, 703–704.
23. Ramelli 2014c. See also Rist 1966.
24. As I argued in Ramelli 2019a and Ramelli 2019b.
25. Ramelli 2007; Russian trans. *Theological Views* 46.3 (2013) 977–1028.
26. For text see Heil and Ritter 1991; for commentary De Andia 2016.
27. Ramelli 2007a and 2012b; on God ἀγαθότης, 2013b.
28. See Ramelli–Konstan 2007: 218–222; Ramelli 2021.
29. Ramelli 2013a: 803–805. Origen already insisted that only God is αἰδιος, absolutely eternal, and the Son alone (with the Spirit) is coeternal with the Father: Ramelli 2021.
30. Ramelli–Konstan 2007: 138–139.
31. *Demonstration of the Gospel* 4.6.1: God the Logos has a ‘monadic-and-henadic’ number.
32. *Ep.Fid.* 2: ‘The Monad-and-Henad indicates the simple and incomprehensible substance’; KG 2.3; 3.1; 4.21: my commentary in Ramelli 2015.
33. Ramelli 2012b; Somos 2000.
34. Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.4–8, analyzed in Ramelli 2012b.
35. *Fr.Eph.* 3.69: θεολογεῖν ἐν ὕμνοις πνευματικοῖς.
36. See Ramelli, in preparation.
37. *Pacificatis omnibus Patrique subiectis, cum erit iam Deus omnia in omnibus, Solomon tantummodo, id est solum Pacificus, nominabitur.*
38. ‘All rational beings will form one and the same henad [ένὰς μία] ... and in the apokatastasis of which some people babble there will be only pure intellects just as in the preexistence of which they blather’. This anathema and the Dionysian passage are Evagrian, although the Origenism condemned at Constantinople was a radicalization of Origen’s and Evagrius’ ideas.
39. *Mor.* 2.7.9, analyzed in Ramelli 2013b; further work on Origen in Augustine is underway.
40. Examined in Ramelli 2010b and 2011.
41. Examined in Ramelli 2017c.
42. Ramelli, 2019c.
43. See Ramelli 2022a; for Evagrius, Ramelli 2017c.
44. God ὑπερέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, *C.Io.* 19.6.37; *Cels.* 7.38; 6.64, adducing Plato, *Resp.* 509B; Ramelli 2021.
45. ‘Therefore, what is unified belongs to the whole divinity, as is argued in the ΘΥ on the basis of very many reasons, drawn from Scriptures / the sages [λογίων]: that it transcends the Good [ὑπεραγαθόν], divinity [ὑπέρθεον], being [ὑπερούσιον], life, wisdom, and whatever is characterized by an ascending abstraction [ὑπεροχική ἀφαιρέσεως]; along with these, the causative epithets are also placed, such as the Good, the Beautiful, Being, life-giver, wise, and all those epithets with which the cause of all goods is called, due to all its goods, which fit the Good’.
46. As I argued in Ramelli 2012b; further 2020.
47. ‘As for the causes of these motives of unity and distinction, which we have found in Scriptures/the wise, and that become God, I have expounded them in the ΘΥ ... For all that is divine, even what has been manifested, can be known only by participation, but in itself, how it is according to its principle and constitution, this transcends (our) intellect



and every essence and knowledge.' The idea of 'becoming God' and 'being worthy of God' is typical of Origen.

48. 'In the *Theological Outlines* I sang the main points of cataphatic theology, how the divine and good nature is called one, forming a unity [ένική], and how it is called triune [τριαδική]; what is paternity therein and what sonship; what theological discourse concerning the Spirit means; how from the immaterial Good, deprived of parts, lights sprang off, from the heart of Goodness, and how these have remained inseparable from the eternal *manentia*, coeternal with the bud, *manentia* of the Father in himself, *manentia* of the Father in himself and the Son in himself, and of the Father and the Son reciprocally; how superessential Jesus has substantiated himself with the truth of the human nature, and all the rest that is sung in the *Theological Outlines*, revealed by Scriptures/the sages [λογίων].'
49. Κάκει μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄνω πρὸς τὰ ἔσχατα κατιῶν ὁ λόγος.
50. Psellus even seems to refer to a work preserved in his day.
51. Ms. Paris, BN Syr. 384, fol.52r, ed. Sherwood 1961: 149. 149: 'Finally, in his *Theological Outlines* and in his treatise *On the Interpretation of Divine Names* he has divinely expounded the teaching of the most sublime knowledge and the most exalted contemplation of the hidden Substance itself'.

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## CHAPTER 8

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# DIONYSIUS AND GREGORY OF NYSSA

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MICHAEL MOTIA

Just before the Council of Constantinople in 381, Gregory of Nyssa wrote:

[God's] being itself ... scripture leaves uninvestigated, as beyond the reach of the mind and inexpressible in word, decreeing that it should be honoured in silence by prohibiting enquiry into the deepest things and by saying that one ought not to 'utter a word in the presence of God'. For this reason one may explore every divinely inspired word, and not find teaching about the divine nature, nor indeed about the essential existence of anything. Hence, we humans live in total ignorance, in the first place about ourselves, and then about everything else.<sup>1</sup>

Gregory argued that humans have no knowledge of God's 'being', or of any essence for that matter. No words—not human conceptual language or the revealed words of Scripture—or even the non-discursive mind can comprehend 'the deepest things' of God; nor can we even know our own essence. This ignorance, moreover, occurs not because humans cannot reach God, but as they stand 'in the presence of God [πρὸ προσώπου θεοῦ]'. This passage intertwines three issues which became central for Dionysius the Areopagite and which this essay highlights: (1) the function of theological language, or what Mark DelCogliano calls the 'theology of theology';<sup>2</sup> (2) the presence of God with respect to human ignorance of God; and (3) a correlation between divine incomparability and human incomparability.

Gregory wrote this passage not in a treatise typically classified as 'mystical theology', but in a doctrinal debate with his chief theological rival, Eunomius of Cyzicus. While Dionysius' language and staging of his mystical theology often parallels Gregory's mystical works (e.g. *The Life of Moses*), to best understand Gregory's influence on Dionysius' mystical theology readers should, as this essay will, look first to the debate between Gregory and Eunomius before turning to Gregory's mystical writing. I argue that how Gregory of Nyssa theorizes language as a practice of moving into rather than 'capturing' mystery, the 'intimacy' of mystery, and the ability for humans to be undone and unknown, constitutes Gregory's most important influence on Dionysius.

## NICAEA, NAMES, AND ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

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Gregory and Eunomius squared off in what would become the final stage of a decades-long debate about the relationship between the persons of the Trinity. In the early fourth century, an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius argued that any ontological continuity between the Father and the Son amounted to confessing two gods, and that, therefore, there must be a sharp distinction between the two, the Father eternal, the Son created. Not only was ‘monotheism’ at stake in this debate, so also was the ‘unknowability’ of God. Rowan Williams has argued that Arius’ conception of the radical ‘break’ between the Father and the Son offers one model of divine incomparability. The Father is unknown, for Arius, in the sense of ‘the inaccessibility of a kind of divine “hinterland”, the mysteriousness of an indefinite source of divinity.’<sup>3</sup> The Father is on one side of an unreachable chasm; the Son and other creatures on the other.

The Council of Nicaea (in 325) rejected Arius’ position and declared the relationship between Father and Son to be ‘*homoousios*’ (consubstantial). Defenders of Nicaea such as Athanasius of Alexandria and later Gregory of Nyssa made two arguments against Arius that are important for this chapter. First, Arius’ effort to safeguard the alterity of God meant that God was not able to make contact with or be involved in the salvation of the world (i.e. God was locked in the divine hinterland). Second, the *taxis* or ordering of the Father and the Son undermined the simplicity of God (i.e. in Arius’ attempt to preserve the simplicity of the Father by keeping him at a distance from the multiplicity of the world, Arius implied that there were parts or degrees of God). Their alternative was that the Son, who became human and present to creation in history, was fully divine. This alternative also fashioned a different sort of divine simplicity and incomparability—not an inaccessibly distant God to be contemplated, but a God whose transcendence includes being more present to Christians than they are to themselves.

Rather than extinguishing questions about the relationship between the persons of the Trinity and divine incomprehensibility, however, the Council of Nicaea ignited another half-century of debate.<sup>4</sup> In the late 350s, Aetius of Antioch and his disciple Eunomius of Cyzicus inserted a novel claim into these debates: that the Son’s essence was different (*heteroousios*) than that of the Father. To understand their claim, it is helpful to see a contrast. For Arius, the radical break between the Father and Son meant that the Father was inherently ‘unknowable’ (ἄγνωστος) and ‘ungraspable’ (ἀκατάληπτος).<sup>5</sup> The Son, like all creatures, was caused by and thus similar to and weaker than his maker. This lesser status meant that the Son lacked the capacity to know the Father.<sup>6</sup>

Aetius and Eunomius—equally concerned as Arius with safeguarding the distinction between creation and creator, with preserving the mystery of God, and with countering the Nicene term *homoousios*—take a different position. For them, to say that the Son is similar to the Father begs the question, ‘In what way are they similar?’ What is the ‘godness’ that allows humans to compare the two essences? Instead, Aetius

and Eunomius argued that the Father is essentially dissimilar (*heteroousios*) from the Son: the Father is essentially unbegotten (*agennetos*), the Son, begotten (*gennetos*). As Michel Barnes has shown, the Father, the heteroousians argue, creates the Son by an act (*energia*) of will, not a sharing of essence. (Were that the case, the only-begotten Son would also share in unbegottenness, which is illogical.) The break between ‘act’ and ‘essence’ guarantees divine simplicity by keeping God’s being uninvolved in the world.<sup>7</sup> The Son’s different essence does not prevent him from knowing the Father, but this knowledge does not affect the Son’s. Their different essences make them incomparable—like asking how orange-like an apple is. As we will see, this essential unlikeness, for the heteroousians, requires a combination of theological language, immediate knowledge, and human faculty to form a contact point between humanity and a distant God.<sup>8</sup>

Eunomius eventually became the figurehead of the heteroousians, and his views grew in popularity to the point where he established a small but notable episcopate of his own. By the 360s, the ‘Cappadocians’—Gregory of Nyssa, his brother Basil of Caesarea, and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus—took note of (and aim at) Eunomius, in part because he and his followers were a threat to their episcopal success, but also because he provided a helpful foil for the theology and spirituality they preached.<sup>9</sup> Eunomius offered a view of theological language, divine incomparability, and anthropology against which they worked out their own. In what follows, we provide an outline of what Gregory of Nyssa argued against.

Examining the history of Trinitarian debates, Socrates Scholasticus preserved a passage that captures the startling degree of knowledge of God for which Eunomius became famous: ‘God does not know anything more about his own essence than we do, nor is that essence better known to him and less to us; rather, whatever we ourselves know about it is exactly what he knows, and conversely, that which he knows is what you will find without change in us.’<sup>10</sup> Assuming this quotation is genuine, this claim of perfect knowledge drew on a theory of language that was popular especially in Neoplatonists’ readings of Plato’s discussion of the relationship between the mind, words, and essences in *Cratylus*.<sup>11</sup> According to these theories, some names are not humanly invented ways to describe God; they originate with God and are providentially provided by God to humanity so that they might know God.

In his *Liber Apologeticus*, Eunomius argues that most words used for God—‘Father’, ‘Son’, ‘Spirit’, and ‘I AM’, being the most controversial—are only human attempts to speak about a God who is simple and unlike anything else.<sup>12</sup> But one word in particular, ‘Unbegotten’ (ἀγέννητος), functions not as one of many human ‘conceptions’ (ἐπίνοιαν), which are made through comparison and are liable to change. It emerges from and speaks the being of God ‘in reality’. He writes:

When we say ‘Unbegotten’ ... we do not imagine that we ought to honour God only in name, in conformity with human invention [κατ’ ἐπίνοιαν ἀνθρωπίνην]; rather, in conformity with reality [κατ’ ἀλήθειαν], we ought to repay him the debt which above all others is most due God: the acknowledgement that he is what he is. Expressions based on invention have their existence in name and utterance only, and by their nature are dissolved along with the sounds [which make them up]; but God,

whether these sounds are silent, sounding, or have even come into existence, and before anything was created, both was and is unbegotten.<sup>13</sup>

The ‘accuracy’ (ἀκριβής) of the name Unbegotten is not that of an attribute that can be pieced together with other attributes to form a thick description. A theory of language, divine incomparability, and theological anthropology come together here, as Eunomius reasons that God’s simple essence requires a simple ‘epistemological transaction that apprehends this essence.’<sup>14</sup> Humans are divinely made with an ‘innate knowledge [φυσικὴν ἐννοίαν]’<sup>15</sup> that makes God’s essence immediately present to them through the name Unbegotten. Eunomius makes an *a priori* argument that what Christians ‘know’ when they know God is *that* God is prior to all things: ‘God neither existed before himself nor did anything else exist before him’, and therefore, the Father ‘is unbegotten essence [οὐσία ἀγέννητος].’<sup>16</sup> This name, therefore, delivers to humans with a faculty to receive it, simple knowledge of a simple God.

There can be only one name, Eunomius argues, for a God who is one, because the name is directly linked to the essence.<sup>17</sup> ‘The ‘unbegotten’ is based neither on invention nor on privation, and is not applied to a part of him only (for he is without parts), and does not exist within him as something separate (for he is simple and uncompounded), and is not something different alongside him (for he is one and only he is unbegotten), then ‘the Unbegotten’ must be unbegotten *essence*.’<sup>18</sup> Every other divine title given in Scripture (Father, Justice, I AM, etc.), when applied to God, ‘is equivalent in force of meaning to ‘the Unbegotten’ because the Father is without parts and uncomposed.’<sup>19</sup> For Eunomius, God’s simplicity means that God’s essence—‘unbegottenness’—is ‘all there is to know.’<sup>20</sup> God remains in the divine hinterland but has arranged language to reveal God’s own essence, an essence so completely different as to be unrelatable. Charles Stang describes this as ‘apophaticism without mysticism’, a clearing of the mind without the intimacy of participation.<sup>21</sup>

Eunomius’ writings, therefore, not only continued a debate about the nature of the Trinity, they also prompted Christianity’s first sustained reflection on the ‘theology of theology’. What was the purpose of theological language? What is the relationship between the divine names that humans confess and what those names signify? And what are the theological consequences of being able to name God ‘accurately’? The kind of language Christians can use for God tells them what kind of God they worship, know, experience, and signify, and what kinds of creatures they themselves are and can become. Gregory’s understanding of theological language, the intimacy of mystery, and human nature responded to the questions Eunomius’ theology raised.

## GREGORY OF NYSSA AND THE ‘THEOLOGY OF THEOLOGY’

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Gregory’s theory of language rests on and demonstrates a conviction about the nature of God and divine incomprehensibility. Before Gregory, most theologians and



philosophers saw divine incomparability as a problem of the human mind and its inability to reach a possibly knowable God.<sup>22</sup> Eunomius' theory of incomparability challenged but also stayed within this human-centric theory of incomparability, as it was premised on the human capacity to know that God is unbegotten and that to be unbegotten is to be prior to all things. Gregory's conception of divine incomparability, by contrast, is not a statement about the strength or weakness of the mind; it is about the nature of God. God, for Gregory, is infinite, beyond the reach of any thought or word, no matter how 'accurate'. Even incorporeal creatures cannot know God's essence because knowledge requires the ability to comprehend or get one's mind around something, and there is no way to circumscribe something with no borders (*CE* 2.67). God's infinitude, however, does not leave Christians staring into an abyss. God's transcendence includes God's imminence in creation. It means that 'we live and move and have our being' in an 'unknown God' (Acts 17:28; *CE* 1.373).

Gregory argues that theological language ought to reflect that intimate mystery. He likens knowledge of God to knowledge of anything else in creation. We know *that* things exist; we are saturated by and experience them, but our *relationship* to them does not give us access to their essence. 'As we look at the sky, and somehow grasp with our visual senses its exalted beauty, we have no doubt that what we see exists; yet if we are asked what it is, we cannot explain its nature in words ... So with the Maker of the world: we know that he Is, but admit we are unable to understand his Being' (*CE* 2.71). The inexplicability of the divine being is not due to its distance. Just as humans can know that the sun gives off heat and light without knowing the essence of the sun, so also can they speak with some confidence about the God they encounter, even if the only certainty they can have is that God transcends all definition.

The pro-Nicene claim that the Son is fully God and that there is an 'identity of operation [*ἐνέργεια*]'<sup>23</sup> between the Father, Son, and Spirit means, for Gregory, that the God who made and sustains the world and whom Christians know in prayer, Scripture, liturgy, sacrament, and virtuous living is in fact the true God (*CE* 3.9.56–60). Theological language emerges from and informs these practices, as God's presence in the world allows Christians to speak of God with analogies to the world as long as they also confess that God transcends all definition and that their own knowledge is always in process. He writes: 'we have a faint and slight apprehension of the divine Nature through reasoning, but we still gather knowledge enough for our slight capacity through the words which are reverently used in it' (*CE* 2.130). Names such as goodness, justice, cause, and beginning are all in some way true of God, even if they are not the essential nature of God. The names Christians give to God do not 'get behind' God's actions to God's essence, or cross the divide between creator and creation and allow them to look at God as an object. Language governs and propels believers beyond words, shaping the faith that 'binds the enquiring mind to the incomprehensible nature' (*CE* 2.91–2.92).

Language, said differently, is part of a larger practice of moving towards what humans do not know. Gregory likens theological language to navigating a ship: it does not make humans masters of the sea, but it does allow them to be in the sea and to explore the unknown. 'We utter such titles for the divine Being which transcends all thought ... to guide ourselves by what is said towards the understanding of hidden things' (*CE*



2.154). For Gregory, we do not have ‘perfect intelligence [ἐντελής ... ὁ νοῦς]’ (or what Eunomius called ‘innate knowledge [φυσικὴν ἔννοιαν]’) implanted in us that could cross the divide between creature and creator (*CE* 2.191). Instead, God implants in human nature the ability to ‘think conceptually’ (*CE* 2.189). What Eunomius sees as a problem—the unsubstantial nature of conceptualization—Gregory sees as a promise: ‘Mental conception [ἐπίνοια] is the way we find out things we do not know, using what is connected and consequent upon our first idea of a subject to discover what lies beyond’ (*CE* 2.182). Over time, Christians are to link different ways they have known God to form a more captious sense of what they mean when they call God incomparable.

To that end, Gregory not only denies that the divine can be captured by any single name, but also affirms that approaching God’s infinite simplicity requires human multiplicity.

While avoiding every kind of concurrence with any wrong notion in our views about God, we make use of a great variety of names for him, adapting our terminology to various concepts. Since no one title has been discovered to embrace the divine Nature by applying directly to the subject itself, we therefore use many titles, each person in accordance with various interests achieving some particular idea about him, to name the Divinity, as we hunt amid the pluriform variety of terms applying to him for sparks to light up our understanding of the object of our quest (*CE* 2.144–2.145).

The names do not congeal into one master name, nor are they so inadequate as to be useless. Rather humans ‘try to make something known about [God] through words and titles reverently conceived’ (*CE* 2.157, 2.477). Weaving together multiple names while insisting that none of them are the essence of God allows Gregory to discuss a God who is at once intimately known and utterly mysterious.

Multiplying names also shapes a disposition towards knowledge of God. Gregory likens humanity’s relationship with God to children trying to grab the light of the sun.

Often, when a sunbeam streams in upon them through a window, they [children] are delighted by its beauty and pounce on what they see, and try to take the sunbeam in their hand, and compete with each other, and grasp the light, catching the ray, as they suppose, in clasped fingers; but when the clasped fingers are opened, the handful of sunbeam makes the children laugh and clap because it has slipped from their hands (*CE* 2.80).

Eunomius, Gregory claims, is like the foolish children, believing that he really ‘caught the ray’ with his ‘syllogisms’. To grasp the light, of course, is to misunderstand the light; and, in the same way, to capture God in a word is to misunderstand God. God’s infinitude implies, for Gregory, that knowledge, which requires distance, delimiting, and defining, is not applicable to the essence of God.<sup>24</sup> God is all-pervasive and impossible to possess. There is, however, another way to be ‘child-like’. Christians are to take delight in watching their words for God slip into joyful wonder as they stretch their hearts to a God who transcends all language.

Rather than a single revealed word that provides an ‘immediate presence,’ Gregory writes, God reveals words ‘like a compassionate mother joining in the baby-talk with the inarticulate whimpering of her babies.’ The words humans use for God, that is, are ‘accommodated’; they take shape, not ‘according to reality,’ but ‘in accordance with our capacity to receive it’ (CE 2.418–2.419). Like a parent with her infant, moreover, the goal is that the language used at one stage of life will mature and grow into deeper understanding. The example of the compassionate mother, then, is not just a negative example that shows the utter distance between human speech and divine reality; it also suggests an intimacy, which counters Eunomius’ emphasis on theological ‘precision’ (ἀκρίβεια). Theological reflection is not a way to know God as God is; it is a practice of relationship. Language should change as relationships deepen.

The subjective work of theology—the way the words for God remake the speaker—is, therefore, constitutive of Gregory’s theological approach. Eunomius begins with a great feat (knowledge of God’s essence), but—perhaps because of a lack of existent writing—it is not clear that the knowledge he promises is necessarily connected to any practice of virtue. For Gregory, language for God can be truthful only if it is part of a larger project of moving towards or growing into an infinite God. And because the divine mystery is inexhaustible it must be hoped for and desired rather than known and achieved (CE 2.93). To see this nexus of language, infinity, and growing desire, we can now turn to *The Life of Moses*.<sup>25</sup>

## DARKNESS AND DESIRE IN GREGORY OF NYSSA’S *THE LIFE OF MOSES*

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By the 390s, when Gregory wrote his most famous mystical works, the Trinitarian debates had settled down, but his years of debate and preaching continued to shape his writings. *The Life of Moses*, written to a monk named Caesarius, fashions the ‘perfection of human nature’ as ‘growth’ in virtue and goodness (*Mos.* 1.10). This dynamic definition of human nature is premised on humans being made in the image of God. Humans become images of what they love, and to be made in the image of an infinite God is not to assimilate to a single image, as God is beyond all images; it is to infinitely increase the desire for an infinite God. ‘Those who know what is good by nature desire participation in it, and since this good has no limit, the participant’s desire itself necessarily has no stopping place but stretches out with the limitless’ (*Mos.* 1.7). Desire, which is endlessly expansive, is the defining feature of humanity and the unit of measure of its perfection.

Gregory stages Moses’ life as an example of this mode of perfection. Moses’ journey begins with desire and is primarily a journey in and into an infinite God. As in the progression of knowledge in *Against Eunomius* Moses first learns to see God, who ‘is himself the Good’ (*Mos.* 1.7), in a ‘light’ that shines through the darkness of ignorance and sin. Accustoming himself to ‘religious knowledge,’ however, must give way to a more

profound knowledge that God is beyond all knowledge and found only in a paradoxical 'luminous darkness'.<sup>26</sup>

An exegetical question situates the book's most influential scene, Moses ascending Mount Sinai and entering into 'the dark cloud where God was' (Exod. 20:21). If 'no one has ever seen God', then how it is that Moses spoke to God 'face to face, as a man speaks with his friends' (John 1:18; Exod. 33:11)? Gregory answers, 'as the mind progresses and, through an ever greater and more perfect diligence, comes to apprehend reality, as it approaches more nearly to contemplation, it sees more clearly what of the divine nature is un contemplated' (*Mos.* 2.162). To see God, Gregory argues, is to see that God becomes more mysterious as God is more known. 'Seeing' God opens Moses to a place where words and comprehension fail even as desire presses onward.

For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. Wherefore John the sublime, who penetrated into the luminous darkness, says, *No one has ever seen God*, thus asserting that knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature (*Mos.* 2.163).

True sight of God requires first stripping away what is observed. But this clearing does not 'uncover' God as God is, nor does it put forward any object to which the mind could safely cling. God grants Moses' desire to see God, but in seeing God, Moses also sees an excess that spurs his desire onward (*Mos.* 2.232). 'Hope always draws the soul from the beauty which is seen to what is beyond, always kindles the desire for the hidden through what is constantly perceived' (*Mos.* 2.231). God can never be the object of knowledge because God is the one drawing Moses into a more expansive love, and only in Moses' being undone by this love can he have 'eyes to see'.

Gregory invokes the Pauline verb *ἐπεκτείνω*<sup>27</sup> in order to implore readers to 'strain towards' a God who is always more than what the mind can comprehend. For Gregory, the verb signifies a constant expansion of the capacity to love even in union with God.

Every desire for the Good [*πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ἢ ἐπιθυμία*] which is attracted to that ascent constantly expands [*συνεπεκτείνεται*] as one progresses in pressing on to the Good.

This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied (*Mos.* 2.238–2.239).

This stretching structures a way of life for Gregory. It requires knowledge of God which is also unknowing as God is discovered to be more than what was previously imagined.

God's presence offers Moses both real intimacy and transcendence. Moses is granted a vision of God, but 'what Moses yearned for [i.e. to see God] is satisfied by the very things which leave his desire unsatisfied' (*Mos.* 2.235). Moses, on Gregory's reading, will never arrive at the essence of God because there is nothing to 'arrive' at when the 'object' of affection is infinite. Each successive moment with God, for Gregory, entices a new way to desire and wonder at God, and a new way to be remade in the image of that unknown God.

## CONCLUSION: DIONYSIUS AND GREGORY

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It is difficult, if not impossible, to pin down how much of Gregory Dionysius read. The watchword, *epektasis*, does not appear in the *Corpus dionysiacum*, although Dionysius does exhort Timothy to 'leave behind the senses and the intellectual activities and all things perceived and understood, all things that are not, all that are, and *strain upward* [ἀνατάθῃτι] unknowingly towards union'.<sup>28</sup> The same root verb (*teinō*), then, governs a familiar scene: Moses ascending Mount Sinai where he will encounter God in 'a ray of darkness'. Dionysius' brief invocation of Moses has a similar progression to Gregory's: Moses moves into the light before entering into the darkness; he then finds words and images of God; and then Moses:

departs from these visions and from those who see them and he enters into the truly mystical darkness of unknowing. He here closes off all that knowledge grasps and comes to be in the one who is entirely untouchable and invisible, and he belongs entirely to the one who is beyond all things and is no thing. Being neither himself nor someone else, he is united in a superior way to the one who is completely unknown by the inactivity of all knowledge. And by knowing nothing, he knows beyond intelligence.<sup>29</sup>

This mystical movement resonates with what we have seen with Gregory: Moses moves through language to a place beyond it; the inability to know God is due to a divine excess; and union with God results in an inability to know oneself. Gregory's influences on Dionysius, therefore, emerge not only from Gregory's mystical theology, but also from the three themes highlighted in Gregory's debates with Eunomius. To conclude, let us separate out the three areas that have largely been analyzed together, and briefly suggest how they relate to or differ from Dionysius.

First, the theology of theology was at the heart of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian debate with Eunomius. They did not disagree only about which words Christians should use for God; they also disagreed about the way language functioned, as theology proclaimed something about the God they worshiped. Gregory's emphasis on the inability of language to properly capture God's essence (e.g. *CE* 2.139–2.140) rightly receives credit for Dionysius' apophaticism. But Gregory also stresses that conceptual language can be in some sense true, and that, in affirming God's activities in the world, Christians gain a

'sense of presence' of what is beyond them. Dionysius' method of affirming and denying every name for God in order to achieve a greater 'unknowing', therefore, owes much to Gregory's insistence on the necessity *and* insufficiency of language. Naming God does not provide an accurate picture of God as much as it is an ascetic practice aimed at clearing the mind of idolatrous comparisons between God and anything else. As it was with Gregory, so for Dionysius neither affirmation nor denial is sufficient. God 'is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is'.<sup>30</sup> The play between affirmation and denial makes space for a God beyond both.

Second, the need to affirm and negate the names of God is tethered to God's imminence in transcendence. Gregory locates divine incomparability in God's infinity. Eunomius' theology of the complete priority of God offers one mode of incomparability, one that kept God distant from the messy multiplicity of creation while also offering knowledge of God. For Gregory, any theory of divine incomparability that kept God at a distance imposed a limit on an unlimited God.<sup>31</sup> Through Christ and the Spirit, this mystery is closer to humans than we are to ourselves, eternally attracting and expanding the soul into deeper union with an infinite God.

When Dionysius writes that God must be 'unknowingly' known 'beyond being', therefore, he is drawing on and radicalizing Gregory's emphasis on divine infinitude. Being 'beyond being', for Dionysius, does not imply that God is only 'above it all'. Rather, God's transcendence means that God can dwell in and surpass all things because God is not one 'being' among others but is instead the cause and sustainer of all.

Third, divine incomparability leads to human incomparability. Humans are defined, for Gregory, by what they love, but when the object of their desire is endless, they must constantly transcend themselves. As Anne Carson writes, 'Desire *changes* the lover ... he feels the change happen but has no ready categories to assess it. The change gives him a glimpse of a self he never knew before'.<sup>32</sup> By stretching out their desire, humans become an image of God and, Gregory writes: 'Since one of the things we contemplate in the divine nature is incomprehensibility, it is altogether necessary that, in this way, the image [εἰκόνα] must hold the imitation along with the archetype [πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἔχειν τὴν μίμησιν]'.<sup>33</sup> To be human is, in part, to be incomparable, to catch glimpses of a self found in a luminous darkness.

While Gregory highlights human mutability, the constant stretching that comes about through relating to an infinite God, Dionysius locates this in human ecstasy and what he calls 'unknowing'. For Dionysius, when Moses ascends the mountain he becomes unknown to himself, but this unknowing happens a bit differently. The Christian following Moses does not grow into a more expansive version of herself (à la Gregory) but instead ecstatically becomes 'neither oneself nor someone else'.<sup>34</sup> Dionysius, we might say, stretches Gregory's theory of *epektasis* to its breaking point. As with Gregory, desire is central to human nature and to its ability to transcend itself, but desire, for Dionysius, leads to an ecstatic rupture; humans become most fully themselves only when they stand outside themselves.

The Trinitarian debates of the fourth century and the mystical theology theorized within them gave definition to questions of the function of language, the intimacy of

mystery, and human incomparability that would persist into the sixth century and beyond. Gregory's theology provided not only the content of Orthodox Christian doctrines, but also *how* those doctrines form and inform Christian practice. As much as to any theological claim, then, Dionysius' corpus inherited a tethering of doctrine to ascetic practices and the spiritual life, to modes of speech and life that could be faithfully stretched towards and remade in an endless God.

## NOTES

1. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 2.105–106, trans. in Karfiková 2007 (hereafter cited as *CE* book.section).
2. DelCogliano 2010: 1.
3. Williams 2001: 242.
4. The Council of Constantinople in 381 established what is now considered 'orthodoxy' with respect to the Trinity. In a debate so long and with so many players—emperors, bishops, laypeople, etc.—the stakes and causes were multiple.
5. Athanasius, *On the Synods at Ariminum* 15.3, trans. Radde-Gallwitz 2009: 168; see Vaggione 2000: 167–168.
6. Athanasius, *Syn. ad Ariminum* 15, trans. Radde-Gallwitz 2009: 168: 'The God is ineffable to the Son/who concisely speaks,/since what he is, is ungraspable for him,/so none of what the Son declares/ he knows by way of comprehending./Truly impossible for him to search out/the Father who exists on his own. For the Son, he does not know his own substance',
7. Barnes 2000: 173–219.
8. Vaggione 2000: 130–133, 246–256; Anatolios 2011: 158–215; for Aetius, see Wickham 1968.
9. While all three 'Cappadocians' argue against Eunomius in a similar way, they also have important differences that resist simple synthesis.
10. Eunomius, *Frag.* 2.3–2.6, in Vaggione 1987. For a discussion, see Vaggione 2000: 253–254.
11. On Eunomius' engagement with Neoplatonist philosophy, see Elm 2012: 246–265; and Mortley 1986: 85–96, 128–159. For parallels between the heteroousian theory of language and that of Athanasius, see DelCogliano 2010: 124–133; and Radde-Gallwitz 2009: 81–86.
12. Eunomius, *Liber Apologeticus* (hereafter cited as *Lib. Ap.*) 16–17, 22–23, in Vaggione 1987.
13. Eunomius, *Lib. Ap.* 8.
14. Anatolios 2011: 159.
15. Eunomius, *Lib. Ap.* 7.
16. Eunomius, *Lib. Ap.* 7.
17. Eunomius, *Lib. Ap.* 18: on the direct connection between names and essences, Eunomius writes, if 'the names are different, the essences are different as well'.
18. Eunomius, *Lib. Ap.* 8.
19. Eunomius, *Lib. Ap.* 19.
20. Radde-Gallwitz 2009: 108.
21. Stang 2012b: 167.
22. Meredith 1999: 13.
23. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Trinity*, *GNO* 3.11.
24. See Williams 2001: 242.
25. Malherbe and Ferguson 1978, (cited in text as *Mos.* book.section); Greek in Daniélou 1968.



26. See Coakley 2003.
27. See Phil 3:13. A classic study on *epektasis* remains Daniélou 1944. See also Ludlow 2007.
28. Dionysius, *MT* 1.1.
29. Dionysius, *MT* 1.3, trans. altered.
30. Dionysius, *DN* 1.7.
31. Williams 2001: 243.
32. Carson 1986: 37.
33. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, J.-P. Migne edition, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 44 (Turnhout: Brepols Editores Pontificii), PG 44 11.2–4, 156, trans. mine.
34. Dionysius, *MT* 1.3. See Stang 2012a.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# DIONYSIUS, IAMBlichUS, AND PROCLUS

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CHARLES M. STANG

THE *Corpus Dionysiacum* (hereafter *CD*) began circulating in the early sixth century in the context of ongoing and increasingly bitter Christological controversies. Modern scholars have floated many hypotheses as to the true identity of the author of this pseudonymous corpus, but by and large they have failed to convince many others, never mind to win a consensus. One thing, however, is certain: whoever wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, the convert of the Apostle Paul, he was deeply immersed in the Neoplatonic tradition, and owes an especial debt to the writings of Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 245–c. 325) and Proclus *diadochus* (412–485). The author wears this debt on his sleeve. Not only does he use the language of ‘theurgy’ and its cognates throughout the corpus, he also weaves Iamblichus’ theory of theurgy into the tapestry of his own mystical and liturgical theology, aligning it with his distinctive Christology. In the case of Proclus, the debt is even clearer, almost provocatively so. The author excerpts Proclus’ account of evil and includes a lightly amended version of it in his longest treatise, *The Divine Names*. He borrows Proclus’ distinctive terminology for divine transcendence, including the (in)famous confession that God is *hyperousios* or ‘beyond being’. While these patently Neoplatonic concepts are often buttressed by biblical (especially Johannine and Pauline) and patristic (especially Cappadocian) language, it is striking how little it seems the author has done to conceal this debt to Neoplatonism, a debt that would seem to jeopardize his authorial identity as a first-century Athenian convert.

The fact that this allegedly first-century corpus seems to contain ample philosophical terminology from later centuries was not lost on its early readers. The scholiast John of Scythopolis (fl. 6<sup>th</sup> c.) may have been inclined to ignore it, and to steer the reader back to the Pauline content that in his mind guarantees the work as authentic.<sup>1</sup> But the Migne edition of the *Prologue* of the *CD* contains this later interpolation, probably authored by the Christian philosopher John Philoponus (d. c. 580):<sup>2</sup>

One must know that some of the non-Christian philosophers, especially Proclus, have often employed certain concepts of the blessed Dionysius ... It is possible to conjecture from this that the ancient philosophers in Athens usurped his works (as he recounts in the present book) and then hid them, so that they themselves might seem to be the progenitors of his divine oracles. According to the dispensation of God the present work is now made known for the refutation of their vanity and recklessness.<sup>3</sup>

Philoponus was well versed in the works of Proclus and so he easily spotted the similarities between the two authors' vocabularies. He inoculates Dionysius from the possible implications of this similarity by reversing the charge: it is the Neoplatonists who have 'usurped' the works of Dionysius the Areopagite; it is they who have shamelessly stolen *from him*. Not only that: they have also succeeded in obscuring their debt by suppressing the circulation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* for centuries. With its sudden reappearance in the sixth century, however, God has exposed this pagan philosophical fraud and set the crooked record straight. Philoponus thereby inoculates Dionysius from what Harold Bloom calls the 'anxiety of influence' and renders the Neoplatonic content of the *CD* licit for Christian readers precisely by claiming it as their own.

That narrative, and others like it, were upended by the advent of modern scholarship on the *CD*. In 1895, Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr independently published arguments with the same conclusion: that the *CD* is considerably indebted to the thought of Proclus and therefore cannot be the genuine writings of the first-century Athenian judge, Dionysius the Areopagite (Koch 1895; Stiglmayr 1895a). The fulcrum of both arguments is DN 4.17–33, wherein Dionysius treats the question of evil under the rubric of the divine name 'Good'. Koch and Stiglmayr demonstrated that in these chapters Dionysius—now, for the first time, *Pseudo*-Dionysius—quotes extensively from Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*. In that same year, Stiglmayr published a companion article arguing that the provenance of the *CD* was late fifth-century Syria–Palestine—a conclusion that, with some refinement, still largely holds sway today (Stiglmayr 1895b). For this part, Koch (1900) subsequently published the definitive study of the pagan philosophical backdrop of the *CD*. In many ways, then, these two scholars set the terms for the subsequent study of the *CD* in the twentieth century. Countless scholars have worked in Koch's wake, attempting to assess the nature and extent of the author's debt to late Neoplatonism.

Not surprisingly, there is an enormous body of literature on Dionysius' debt to Neoplatonism.<sup>4</sup> This chapter hopes to assess that debt by exploring Dionysius' creative appropriation of some of Iamblichus' and Proclus' distinctive terminology. The first section focuses on his debt to Iamblichus—specifically, his appropriation of the language of 'theurgy'. This will require backing up and discussing theurgy in the *Chaldean Oracles* and Iamblichus' debate with Porphyry of Tyre (c. 234–c. 305). The second section focuses on Dionysius' debt to Proclus—specifically his appropriation of Proclus' language of divine transcendence: 'beyond-being' (*hyperousios*) and 'beyond-beingness' (*hyperousiotêtos*). Rather than attempt a grand survey of Neoplatonism's influence on

Dionysius, then, this chapter will focus on the significance of these two specific debts of Dionysius to two towering figures of the Neoplatonic tradition.

## IAMBlichUS AND THEURGY

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In order to appreciate the influence of Iamblichus on Dionysius, we must begin with the relevant terminology.<sup>5</sup> ‘Theurgy’ and its cognate ‘theurgical’ appear more than ten times in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, more than thirty times in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, five times in the *Divine Names*, and once in *Letter 9*.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the *CD*, Dionysius appeals to theurgy or the ‘work of God’ to refer, generally, to God’s saving work in the world and, specifically, to Christ’s incarnation. For example, in the first mention of theurgy, Dionysius remarks that John the Baptist was to serve as a prophet of ‘the human theurgy of Jesus.’<sup>7</sup> He uses the same phrase in the plural, ‘the human theurgies of Jesus’, as a description of the gospels.<sup>8</sup> Several lines later, he says that the purpose of the Psalms is ‘to sing all the words and all the works of God.’<sup>9</sup> And while the Old Testament speaks of ‘the theurgies of Jesus’ that are to come, the New Testament affirms them as having been accomplished. It is in this context, then, that Dionysius makes what has appeared to some a provocative claim, namely that ‘theurgy is the consummation of theology.’<sup>10</sup> But, in this context at least, he seems to mean simply that the incarnation of Christ is the consummation of all the scriptural prophecies: the word of God predicts the work of God. All this would lead us to conclude that, for Dionysius, theurgy or ‘the work of God’ is first and foremost Christ Incarnate, the event the Old Testament foretold and the New Testament celebrates as accomplished.

To a sixth-century reader, it might have appeared strange that a Christian author would speak in such a way, of the Incarnate Christ and his miraculous works, and the gospels that record them, collectively as ‘theurgy’. After all, theurgy was commonly associated with the *Chaldean Oracles*, pagan Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus, and miracle workers who charmed the emperor Julian into his apostasy. Remember, however, that at least some early readers, such as Philoponus, had already reversed the chronology, such that Dionysius’ appeal to theurgy was the original (first-century) articulation of the concept, and the subsequent pagan articulations were understood to be perverted appropriations. Still, in order to appreciate fully how Dionysius inherited and innovated on the tradition of pagan theurgy, we must back up and consider first the *Oracles* and then Iamblichus.

The origins of the so-called *Chaldean Oracles* are shrouded in mystery. The original poetic composition in hexameter verse has not survived. What remains are only quotations from later admirers of the poem.<sup>11</sup> The oracles were in circulation by the third century, and although they seem to have made no impression on Plotinus, they were at the heart of the controversy between Porphyry and Iamblichus (as we shall see later). They are usually attributed to a certain Julian ‘the Theurgist’ and sometimes to his father, also Julian, surnamed ‘the Chaldean’. This pair may indeed have come from Chaldea

(that is, Babylon), and may have been trading on the prestige of Eastern wisdom for a Western audience. There is some question as to whether the poem was understood to be a divine revelation, perhaps even that the elder Julian raised his son to serve as an oracular mouthpiece. In any case, the *Chaldean Oracles* came to be regarded by the later Neoplatonists as authoritative revelation on a par with Plato's *Timaeus*. Franz Cumont famously dubs them the 'Bible of the neo-Platonists'.<sup>12</sup>

For our purposes, the *Oracles*' relevance has to do with their association with theurgy. Not only was their presumed author (or mouthpiece), Julian, labelled a 'theurgist', but the collection was associated in its day, and well after, with the practice of theurgy. This is somewhat hard for us to appreciate, given that in what remains of the poem the term 'theurgy' never appears, and 'theurgist' only once. But in the later passages that introduce the direct quotations themselves, 'theurgist' appears often, but never 'theurgy'. For example, when Proclus offers a gloss on a direct quotation from the oracles, he remarks that 'the gods counsel the theurgists to unite (συνάπτειν) themselves with God'.<sup>13</sup> On the basis of this, it is often said that the goal of theurgy is union with the god(s). The problem, of course, is that this 'union' (σύναψις) is not attested in the oracles themselves, but only in Proclus' explanatory glosses.<sup>14</sup> The same goes for another common term for union, ἔνωσις: the oracles do not use it and while Proclus uses it twice in introducing a quotation, in neither case does it refer to a *unio mystica* between a theurgist and the god(s).<sup>15</sup> In short, the surviving oracles themselves provide scant evidence for the claim that the goal of theurgy is union with the god(s).

By contrast, a Byzantine encyclopaedia entry tells us that the younger Julian accompanied Marcus Aurelius on a campaign and that when the Romans were suffering from thirst he 'suddenly created and summoned up dark-coloured clouds and let loose heavy rain along with thunder and lightning bolts one after another. And this (they say) Julian worked through (ἐργάσασθαι) by means of some wisdom'.<sup>16</sup> Are miracles such as this the goal of theurgy? If so, perhaps it is something more mercenary, more akin to magic. In sum, the *Oracles* do not offer up an obvious account of the goal of theurgy. What we have, on the one hand, is Proclus' gloss on the goal of theurgy—namely union with the god(s)—and a legend about Julian's wonder-working in the service of the Roman army. No doubt the intervening Neoplatonic reception is influencing Proclus here, just as Christian suspicion of pagan miracle-men is influencing the legend.

Much of the impasse stems from the fundamental ambiguity in the word 'theurgy' itself. If θεουργία is a conjunction of the phrase 'the work of God' (ἔργον θεοῦ), then there are two obvious interpretations. If θεοῦ is understood as an objective genitive, then theurgy is the 'work' that the theurgist does 'on the gods', that is, he influences or even compels them to do whatever he wishes. If θεοῦ is understood as a subjective genitive, then theurgy is the work that the gods themselves do, presumably in and through the theurgist, in which case he becomes a sort of vessel for divine action. The problem is that the *Oracles* do not clearly settle the issue, as we have seen. In the absence of a clear answer from the *Oracles* themselves, scholars have looked to adjacent traditions. Those who are suspicious of theurgy tend to assimilate it to overtly manipulative magical traditions and figure it along the objective axis. Those who are more generous to theurgy

tend to assimilate it to the later Neoplatonists' theories of theurgy and figure it along the subjective axis. Some prefer to see two threads within the larger theurgical tradition, one focused on magical manipulation and the other on deifying union with the gods. The history of scholarship on theurgy can be plotted along this spectrum of objective vs. subjective genitives.

The question of theurgy's ultimate end, and the means to that end, was a source of controversy between Porphyry and Iamblichus. Porphyry wrote two works on theurgy, both of which survive only in fragments: *Philosophy from Oracles* and the *Letter to Anebo*.<sup>17</sup> It seems he was genuinely torn about theurgy, unsure whether it promised deifying union or was merely a manipulative means for all-too-human ends. In the *City of God*, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) calls Porphyry to task for equivocating on theurgy, for 'maintaining two contradictory positions, and wavering between a superstition ... and a philosophical standpoint'.<sup>18</sup> While Augustine faults Porphyry's general vacillation on the matter of theurgy, he praises him for his *Letter to Anebo*, where the philosopher claims that theurgy is a means of compelling the gods—who are of course not gods, for Augustine, but demons—to accomplish some mercenary end.<sup>19</sup> From what remains of his letter, it is clear that Porphyry finds it appalling that some theurgists feel that they can compel the gods to do their bidding. Apart from this being an affront to divine impassibility, Porphyry is disappointed that any theurgists would put this art to such petty purposes, including one theurgist who thwarted a rival's efforts to ply his trade. Porphyry's complaints would seem to give some credence to the notion that theurgy was, at least in the third century, a rather broad tradition, including mercenary and mystical threads.

Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* roused his fellow Syrian Iamblichus to pen what is regarded as the masterpiece of theurgical theory, *On the Mysteries* (Clark, Dillon, and Hershbell 2004). From the start, Iamblichus is keen to rebut Porphyry's charges that theurgists presume to compel the gods in any way:

For the illumination that comes about as a result of invocations is self-revelatory and self-willed, and is far removed from being drawn down by force, but rather proceeds to manifestation by reason of its own divine energy and perfection, and is as far superior to (human) voluntary motion as the divine will of the Good is to the life of ordinary deliberation and choice. It is by virtue of such will, then, that the gods in their benevolence and graciousness unstintingly shed their light upon theurgists, summoning up their souls to themselves and orchestrating their union with them, accustoming them, even while still in the body, to detach themselves from their bodies, and to turn themselves towards their eternal and intelligible first principle.<sup>20</sup>

According to Iamblichus, the agency at work in theurgy or 'god-work' is always divine. In grammatical terms, then, Iamblichus would insist that the *theou*- in 'theurgy' should be understood as a subjective genitive, that the gods are the ones doing the work 'disposing the human mind to participation in [them]'.<sup>21</sup>

Iamblichus seems to have won the day. After him, Neoplatonists are consistently enthusiastic about theurgy and come to regard the *Chaldean Oracles* as divine

revelation—in Cumont's words, a 'bible' of sorts. Furthermore, at least in the realm of theurgic theory, Iamblichus' successors follow his lead and regard 'god-work' as the channelling of a divine energy always on offer, and not as a means to compel the gods to our bidding. He is, in short, the great theoretical reformer of theurgy and renders it in such a way that it can be easily adapted to a Christian mystical theology.

In order to appreciate how Dionysius appropriated Iamblichean theurgy for his own mystical and liturgical theology, we must first understand his Christology. The *CD* presents a very robust Christology, albeit one that does not centre on the life, ministry, or atoning death of Christ. Instead, Dionysius seems primarily interested in a resurrected Christ who appears to his faithful in the present as divine light. In order to appreciate the Christological dimension of the Dionysian universe, we must recall his definition of hierarchy, a word he coins to characterize the seamless order that obtains in the angelic ranks and their earthly counterpart, the Church. In *CH* 3.1, Dionysius defines hierarchy as 'a sacred order, an understanding, and an energy, (the whole of which) is being approximated as closely as possible to the divine.'<sup>22</sup> 'The goal of a hierarchy, then,' he continues in *CH* 3.2, 'is the assimilation and union, as far as is possible, with God.'<sup>23</sup>

Hierarchy, celestial or ecclesiastical, is God's providential ordering of the world such that creatures are arrayed in such a way that they are different and distant from one another. This distance between different creatures is the space that allows for something to move through them, and this something is the 'energy' of the hierarchies. The energy that moves through the hierarchies is most often described as light. Assimilation and union—which together constitute deification—consist in creatures consenting to be conduits of this energy, agreeing to receive and pass on the light that flows through the hierarchies in both directions. The energy flows through the hierarchies, proceeding from (πρόοδος) and returning to (ἐπιστροφή) the divine source or 'thearchy'; creatures imitate the divine source by allowing the energy to move through them from superior to inferior along the great chain of being, and vice versa. Access to this energy, however, is available only within the hierarchy, that is, for humans at least, only in Church.

If 'theurgy' refers generally to God's salvific work in the world, and specifically to his pre-eminent work, the Incarnation, then 'energy' would also seem to refer generally to God's work *in* (ἐν-έργεια) the world, that is, in the hierarchies, and specifically to the light of Christ that flows through them. In this regard, 'theurgy' and 'energy' are nearly interchangeable: they both refer to Christ, whom we are called to channel as conduits. Dionysius' account of Christ as light derives from Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, as thrice narrated in Acts (9:3–9, 22:6–11, 26:13–18). Putting the Pauline pedigree to one side, however, one can see how both the hierarchical treatises open by soliciting this luminous Jesus. In *EH* 1.1, for example, Dionysius explains how:

Jesus himself, the most supremely divine mind beyond being, the source and essence and most supremely divine power of every hierarchy and sanctification and work of God (θεουργίας), illuminates the blessed beings who are greater than we are [i.e. angels] ... and thus by looking upwards to the blessed and supremely divine ray of Jesus, reverently gazing upon whatever it is permitted us to see, illuminated with



the knowledge of the visions, *we will be able to become*, with respect to mystical understanding, purified and purifiers, images of light and *theurgical* (θεουργικοί) perfected and perfecting [my emphasis].<sup>24</sup>

By beholding the light of Christ, the ‘divine ray of Jesus’, we become ‘theurgical’, that is, we become images of Christ’s light, purified and perfected because Christ-like.

Nowhere is this clearer than in CH 3.2, where, just after he has announced that the goal of hierarchy is the deification of its members, he explains that:

[f]or each member who has been called into the hierarchy, perfection consists in being uplifted to the imitation of God according to proper analogy and, what is even more divine than all, as the scriptures say, to become ‘a co-worker with God’ (θεοῦ συνεργόν) and to show the divine energy (τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν) in himself as far as is possible.<sup>25</sup>

Dionysius borrows the phrase ‘co-worker with God’ from Paul, who in 1 Cor. 3:9, for example, announces, ‘we are co-workers of God’ (θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί). He understands the Pauline phrase as a description of those Christians who have agreed to channel and show ‘the divine energy’, the light of Christ. He refrains from using the title ‘theurgist’ or ‘god-worker’ to describe such Christians, although as we have seen, he does not shy away from calling them ‘theurgical’. The Pauline phrase, which could be translated literally as ‘co-god-worker’, is very close to ‘theurgist’ indeed. At the root of all these terms, is ἔργον or ‘work’. Although it is difficult to convey the lexical integrity in English translation, in Greek it shows forth quite easily: cooperation (συνεργία) with the work of God (θεουργία) or the divine energy (ἡ θεία ἐνέργεια) which is available only through the Church’s liturgy (λειτουργία), renders us co-workers with God (θεοῦ συνεργοί), theurgical (θεουργικοί)—in effect, theurgists.

We are in a position now to see how Dionysius inherits and innovates on the tradition of Iamblichean theurgy. As was clear from the outset, Dionysius did not inherit the characteristic practices of theurgy. The liturgical context Dionysius describes in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is a familiarly Christian one. His account of what is *at work* in this Christian liturgy and *how* is perhaps less familiar, although, I would insist, no less Christian. Like Iamblichus, Dionysius insists that a divine energy is always on offer to us, wishing to work in and through us, and to which we must but consent. Like Iamblichus, Dionysius held that if we consent to channel this divine energy, we will be uplifted, assimilated, and united to that energy—in others words, deified. Like Iamblichus, Dionysius specifies the contexts in which we can access this divine energy, and that is where they seem to part ways. Dionysius seems unambiguous that our only access to the divine energy is through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, that is, through the orders and sacraments of the Church. In this regard, Dionysius has narrowed the scope of Iamblichaen theurgy, which while certainly ritualistic, allows for a plurality of deifying hierarchies corresponding to the religious pluralism of the ancient Mediterranean world. So too with the divine energy or ‘work of god’: for Iamblichus,

the ‘work of god’, while ultimately one, is refracted through the many gods who reveal its different aspects; for Dionysius the ‘work of God’ is Christ himself and none other, Christ who proceeds into plurality in order to gather it up into unity. Here then is the impasse: while Iamblichean theurgy might be willing to cede the Christian ecclesiastical hierarchy a place within the plurality of deifying hierarchies, Dionysian theurgy cannot do the same. For Dionysius, the deifying ‘work of God’ is, at least for now, on offer in only one hierarchy: as he puts it, ‘ours’. But whereas Dionysius is open to only one deifying hierarchy, he does imagine that the deification on offer in that hierarchy is corporate, that is, that divine energy must flow in and out of all the members of the hierarchy. In this sense, Dionysian theurgy is ‘congregational’, whereas, as Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon have argued, the pagan Neoplatonist theurgist ‘appears as more of a lone figure, concerned only, or primarily, with his own personal unification.’<sup>26</sup>

## PROCLUS AND ‘BEYOND BEING’

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The central teaching of Dionysius’ mystical theology, as found in the short text by that name and in the longer treatise, *the Divine Names*, is that God is ‘beyond being’ and ‘unknown’. This God, however, is hardly inaccessible, and the aim of the *CD* is to train up Christians who can encounter the unknown God beyond being in and through those things that exist and can be known. Our focus will be Dionysius’ confession that God is ‘beyond being’ (*hyperousios*), in part because it is the basis for the confession that God is ‘unknown’ and even ‘unknowable’ (both senses are captured in the Greek adjective *agnostos*), and in part because it is one of the places where Dionysius’ debt to Proclus is most clear.<sup>27</sup>

That God or the first principle is ‘beyond being’ is hardly a radical confession for any Platonist. A single passage in Plato’s *Republic* serves as the point of reference for almost all subsequent discussion: ‘Therefore you should also say that the objects of knowledge owe not only their being known to the Good, but even their very existence and being, though the Good is not being but is beyond being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας), exceeding (ὑπερέχοντος) it in dignity and power.’<sup>28</sup> Here, Socrates is exploring the possibility that a single form, the Good, might be the principle behind all the other intelligible forms or ‘objects of knowledge’. Since these intelligible forms are what truly exist (the really real), and since the Good is the source of these objects of knowledge, then the Good itself must be beyond being. The phrase ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας becomes shorthand in the Platonist tradition for this view. Note also that Plato has Socrates say that the Good ‘is above’ or ‘exceeds’—we will return to this verb ὑπερέχω later.

As is well known, Plotinus combines this description of the Good from Plato’s *Republic* with the description of the One from Plato’s *Parmenides* to build up his own metaphysics of three hypostases: the One or the Good, the single source beyond being and apprehension; Intellect, true being existing in eternity; and Soul, the translation of

intelligible reality into time. Plotinus often indexes his view to Plato's phrase, 'beyond being' (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας):

That [One] is the productive power (δύναμις) of all things, and its product is already all things. But if this product is all things, that Principle is beyond all things (ἐπέκεινα τῶν πάντων): therefore 'beyond being' (ἐπέκεινα ἄρα οὐσίας); and if the product is all things but the One is before all things and not equal to all things, in this way too it must be 'beyond being' (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). That is, also beyond Intellect; there is, then, something beyond Intellect (ἐπέκεινα ἄρα τι νοῦ). For being is not a dead thing, nor is it not life or not thinking; Intellect and being are one and the same thing.<sup>29</sup>

Here Plotinus makes clear that if the One (or Good) is beyond being, then it must also be beyond intellect. This is what Eric Perl regards as 'the foundational principle of Neoplatonic thought', namely that 'to be is to be intelligible': whatever exists must be intelligible, and whatever is intelligible must exist, for, as Plotinus puts it earlier, 'intellect and being are the same thing'.<sup>30</sup> The implication is that one cannot think the source of thought, that the One (or Good) cannot be an object of intellectual apprehension. This is essentially the same claim as we find in Proclus and Dionysius, namely that the God beyond being cannot be an object of knowledge, that it is not and cannot be known, but is rather unknown.

This notion that the highest principle, the One or the Good, is 'beyond being' is a veritable pillar of Neoplatonism. While Plotinus and Proclus (and even Dionysius) repeat the same Platonic phrase, ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, as a kind of shorthand for this view, Proclus introduces an important shift in terminology. Alongside the adverbial phrase, ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, he introduces the preposition ὑπὲρ in adjectival and adverbial compounds: ὑπερούσιος, 'beyond being' and ὑπερουσίως, 'in a manner beyond being'. In his *Elements of Theology*, for example, we find him using both sets of terms.<sup>31</sup>

Dionysius follows Proclus and in fact introduces a third ὑπὲρ compound, the noun ὑπερουσιότης or 'beyond-beingness', as a name for the transcendent Godhead. In the CD ὑπὲρ terms such as 'beyond being' or 'beyond-beingness'—and many more besides—proliferate. Just as the two treatises on the hierarchies, celestial and ecclesiastical, begin with appeals to theurgy, so too both the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names* begin with appeals to the God 'beyond being'. The opening line of the *Mystical Theology* addresses the triune God: 'Three beyond being (ὑπερούσιε), beyond god (ὑπέρθεε), and beyond good (ὑπεράγαθε)'.<sup>32</sup> Dionysius' enthusiasm for ὑπὲρ compounds, therefore, goes well beyond the language of being: the unknown God beyond being is in fact beyond god and good. The second paragraph of the *Divine Names* reads:

Therefore we must not dare to say or think anything the hidden divinity beyond being (τῆς ὑπερουσιότητος καὶ κρυφίας θεότητος), apart from those things divinely revealed to us in the oracles. Since the unknowing (ἀγνώσια) of what is beyond being (ὑπερουσιότητος) is beyond speech, intellect, or being (ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ νοῦν καὶ οὐσίαν), one must ascribe to it an understanding beyond being (τὴν ὑπερούσιον

ἐπιστήμην) ... [The divinity] is as no other being is. Cause of being to all, but not itself existing, since it is beyond every being (πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα), it alone could make itself known with authority and understanding.<sup>33</sup>

One could easily find such a paragraph in Proclus. There is the *de rigueur* allusion to the phrase from the *Republic*, πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα, alongside the frequent use of the adjective ὑπερούσιος, to describe both the Godhead itself (θεότητος) and very our understanding (ἐπιστήμη) of that Godhead—which understanding is equivalent to unknowing (ἄγνωσία). There is also the proliferation of ὑπέρ, used to describe how our unknowing of the Godhead's beyond-beingness (ὑπερουσιότητος) is also itself beyond (ὑπέρ) speech (λόγος), intellect (νοῦς), and being (οὐσία).

But what is the significance of Proclus' shift in terminology, which Dionysius largely follows? First, there is the literary advantage. One can much more easily string ὑπέρ compounds into longer phrases and clauses, than one can the adverbial phrase ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας. As a result, ὑπέρ compounds can proliferate in a single passage, as we saw earlier in the DN, nearly overwhelming the reader with transcendental reminders. The fact that ὑπέρ can also easily be added to other adjectives, adverbs, nouns, participles, and verbs—well beyond the language of 'being', for example—allows for a literary and conceptual coherence to Dionysius' prose. Whatever else a reader may gather about this confession, he will know that the divine source is somehow and always 'beyond'.

And it may be that therein lies the more philosophically significant fact in Proclus' and Dionysius' shift to the language of ὑπέρ compounds. The adverb ἐπέκεινα means 'beyond', but in the specific sense of 'on yonder side' (LSJ III). As Timothy Knepper has pointed out, the preposition ὑπέρ means 'above' or 'beyond' and thus conveys two distinct spatial relations: being above something (on a vertical axis) and being beyond or across something (on a horizontal axis). These two spatial relations in turn suggest two distinct logical meanings: (i) an overflowing measure of something or (ii) a complete separation from something. If we apply this to the confession that God is ὑπερούσιος, then it remains ambiguous whether God exists to an excessive measure (the first meaning) or whether God exceeds beyond being (the second meaning).<sup>34</sup>

Knepper's attention is especially fixed on the concept of ὑπεροχή (from ὑπερέχω, meaning to have or to be something, but in a manner somehow 'beyond') and often translated as supereminence (as in the *via supereminentia*) or excess. Knepper takes the tension inherent in ὑπεροχή as representative of an ambiguity inherent in all confessions of a transcendent principle or God beyond being. As John D. Jones puts it:

Thus, for Dionysius ὑπεροχή is fundamentally ambiguous. In one sense, it expresses the pre-eminence of the divine cause and it is the expression of negative theology within metaphysics. In another sense it, like ὑπερύπαρξις (beyond-source) and ὑπέρων (beyond-being), denies cause. It is the expression of negative (mystical) theology which denies all expression.<sup>35</sup>

The ambiguity in ὑπεροχή and by extension in all ὑπέρ compounds, then, conveys the ambiguity that the One (or Good) or the God beyond being is both, on the one hand, the

cause of all things and, on the other hand, entirely beyond cause, exceeding or eluding any tether to its effects.

As we saw earlier, the verb ὑπερέχω appears in the very passage from Plato's *Republic* to which Neoplatonists make such frequent appeal: 'the Good itself is not being but still is above (ὑπερέχοντος), beyond being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) in dignity and power'. Proclus thus returns to this passage and, instead of putting his whole weight on the phrase ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (as Plotinus does), he gives renewed attention to the verb ὑπερέχω. In a sense, then, Proclus recovers ὑπερέχω and highlights its inherent tension between transcendence and immanence. Knepper, speaking now of Dionysius, addresses the philosophical—or more exactly, theological—significance of this tension:

Although this [apophatic] excess is ambiguous between an exceeding beyond and an excessive measure, it is so in a way that seems unavoidable—not only for Dionysius but for any negative theologian who wishes to proclaim God's transcendence over every thing or being or property, and also to hymn God as something (rather than absolutely nothing), moreover as something good and desirable (rather than malicious and loathsome). And either way of relieving this ambiguity, or resolving this tension, is unsatisfactory. To resolve it in the direction of overflowing superabundance is to risk equating creature and creator (or emanator) in a way that is idolatrous. To resolve it in the direction of total removal is not only to sever all connection between creature and creator (including creation or emanation itself) but also to risk making God functionally equivalent to absolutely nothing at all. This is the tension of negative theology. And it should not, cannot, be eliminated.<sup>36</sup>

Dionysius extends the reach of this tension by peppering his prose with ὑπὲρ and its compounds. While he is, of course, following Proclus' lead, the increased density of ὑπὲρ is striking. In the first two sentences of the *Mystical Theology*, for example, he uses ὑπὲρ no less than ten times. The rhetorical effect is to bathe the reader in the language of 'beyond': nearly every sentence signals that God is entirely 'beyond' us and so our speech and knowledge of that God must also go beyond itself. The philosophical effect is to deliver the reader into the irresolvable tension between God as transcendent and immanent, a tension that is inherent in the preposition ὑπὲρ.

## CONCLUSION

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This exploration of the influence of Iamblichus and Proclus on Dionysius has focused on his inheritance of their distinctive terminology: in the case of Iamblichus, his creative appropriation of the language of 'theurgy'; in the case of Proclus, of 'beyond being'. In the case of Iamblichus, Dionysius borrows the term 'theurgy' (and its cognates) but fundamentally redefines its meaning: 'the work of god' comes to mean the Incarnation of Christ and, by extension, the texts and traditions that predict or celebrate that Incarnation. But while he redefines, or specifies, the God that is work in and among

us—namely the Incarnate Christ—Dionysius more or less retains Iamblichus’ understanding of *how* theurgy works, how God (or the gods) work to deify us through sacrament and ritual. Dionysius, then, seeks not to reform the Christian liturgy, but rather to reform our understanding of it and how it works. In the case of Proclus, by contrast, when Dionysius borrows Proclus’ language of ‘beyond being,’ he seems to mean with that term (and its cognates) much the same as Proclus meant by it. For both, the fundamental tension inherent in ‘beyond’ is crucial and irresolvable. In this respect, then, Dionysius, innovates not so much in quality but in quantity: he goes even further than Proclus does with the proliferation of ‘beyond.’ Thus, while he would seem to agree with Proclus in philosophical terms, his repeated use of ‘beyond’ gives to his prose at times an almost hypnotic quality. This repetition, however, may be better understood not as hypnosis per se, but as a kind of linguistic ritual—perhaps akin to a mantra—in which the reader comes to intone the word ‘beyond’ so many times, and in so many forms, that he is moved beyond himself, outside himself, and thus open to the inworking of another, the light-energy of the Incarnate Christ.

## NOTES

1. On John of Scythopolis and his scholia on the *CD*, see Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998.
2. Suchla 1984: 185–187.
3. PG 4:21.12–37, 21.38–24.26; cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 106.
4. See, for example Müller 1918; Corsini 1962; Brons 1976; Gersh 1978, Beierwaltes 1998; Schäfer 2006; Perl 2007; Klitenic Wear and Dillon 2007; Knepper 2014.
5. Much of this section is material reworked from Stang 2011.
6. Based on the Index in *Corpus Dionysiacum II* for *θεουργία*, *θεουργικός*, and *θεουργός*. In the four instances in which Dionysius uses the term *θεουργός*, he uses it as an adjective, following Iamblichus, and not as a noun meaning ‘theurgist.’ See LSJ ‘*θεουργός*’ III.
7. CH 4.4.181B (*CD* II 23,3). All English translations are my own. All citations in Greek are from the standard critical edition of Suchla, Heil, and Ritter. In what follows, I refer to the entire *Corpus Dionysiacum* as the *CD* and its parts with the following abbreviations: DN = *Divine Names*, CH = *Celestial Hierarchy*, EH = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, MT = *Mystical Theology*, and Ep. = Letters.
8. EH 3.3.4 429C (*CD* II 83, 20).
9. EH 3.3.4 429D (*CD* II 84, 2–3).
10. EH 3.3.5 432B (*CD* II 84, 17–21).
11. See Majercik 1989. Hereafter fragments are cited by number from this edition.
12. Cumont 1911: 279.
13. Majercik 1989: §48.
14. Cf. Majercik 1989: §§4, 122, and 126 (συνάπτω).
15. Majercik 1989: 22–23.
16. Suda, ‘Iuolianos’ (iota, 434). Suda online. Trans. Catharine Roth. 20 July 2004. 13 June 2019. <<http://www.stoa.org/sol-entries/iota/434>>.
17. Sodano 1958; Wolff 1962.



18. *De civitate dei* 10.9; Bettenson 2003: 387.
19. *De civitate dei* 10.11; Bettenson 2003: 387.
20. *De mysteriis* 1.12; Clark et al 2004: 50–53.
21. *De mysteriis*. See Shaw 1999. I am indebted to Shaw for my earlier discussion of the subjective vs objective genitive framing of theurgy.
22. CH 3.1 164D (CD II 17, 3–4).
23. CH 3.1 165A (CD II 17, 10–11).
24. EH 1.1 372A–B (CD II 63, 12–64, 2; 64, 10–14).
25. CH 3.2 165B (CD II 18, 14–17).
26. Klitenic Wear and Dillon 2007: 115.
27. This second part of the chapter owes much to Tichelkamp 2017, especially Ch. 2 on the CD.
28. Plato, *Republic* 509B (translation my own).
29. Plotinus, *Enneads* (trans. A. H. Armstrong), V.4.2. 38–44.
30. Perl 2007: 5.
31. In the Index Verborum of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, for example, we find several references to ἐπέκεινα (8.32; 22.1†al.); whereas for ὑπερούσιος and related compounds we find a good deal more: ὑπερούσιος (100.28†; 104.16†; 106.22; 108.25; 110.2; 114.18; 120.12; 122.3,5); τὸ ὑπερούσιον (122.15); τὰ ὑπερούσια (134.25); ὑπερουσίως (104.7,15,19; 128.14).
32. MT 1.1 997A (CD II 141, 1).
33. DN 1.1 588A, B (CD I 108, 6–9; 109).
34. Knepper 2008: 628.
35. Jones 1980: 95.
36. Knepper 2008: 636–637.

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## CHAPTER 10

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# GOD IN DIONYSIUS AND THE LATER NEOPLATONISTS

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MARK EDWARDS AND JOHN DILLON

WHILE some debt to the Platonists is apparent in almost every theologian of the early Church, we are more accustomed to verbal allusion, tacit criticism, and unsignalled reminiscence than to the lengthy and unabashed plagiarism that punctuates the work of Dionysius.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps he never intended to deceive, for his Byzantine readers already saw that his claim to be Paul's disciple, and therefore an author of the first century, was tenable only if one assumed that Proclus had made liberal drafts on his reasoning and his innovative vocabulary in the futile hope of reconciling the Church and the emperor to the survival of his pagan school. Although the authenticity of the Dionysian writings was upheld by Roman Catholics as late as the nineteenth century, and in some Orthodox circles for even longer, no scholar of any standing now maintains that the Dionysian corpus is genuine. It is manifestly improbable that Dionysius could have anticipated the ripest developments of Neoplatonism, without attracting the notice of any pagan or Christian author, until his teachings were surreptitiously usurped by the moribund school of Athens after the lapse of almost four hundred years. The contrary position, that it was he who stole from Proclus, is now a philological commonplace, and has raised a doubt among theologians as to whether Dionysius was a Christian in anything but name.

There was no doubt for Martin Luther, who averred that he could find no mention of Christ in Dionysius, while his Swedish disciple Anders Nygren argued that Dionysius represents a terminal stage in the assimilation of *agapê*, the unmotivated and sacrificial love of God for his creatures, to the egocentric pursuit of deification on our own part, which the Platonists fostered under the name of *erôs*.<sup>2</sup> Both assertions are factually erroneous, as we shall see in the present chapter, and both unjustly assume unjustly that the abundant and explicit use of Scripture in Dionysius, far outweighing his unacknowledged borrowings from the Platonists, is disingenuous and superficial. The argument that he was a crypto-Platonist has not been put to rest even now, despite the absence in the Athenian

school of liturgical rites or sacerdotal institutions to compare with those that are so minutely prescribed in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. It is not inconceivable that the school admitted Christian pupils, as one might infer from the occurrence of the name Eusebius in Damascius' life of the scholar Isidorus.<sup>3</sup> The question of his allegiance cannot be evaded by denying that there was any clear line between Christianity and Platonism, for the dichotomy was maintained with vigour by all the known adherents of both traditions in this era. We do, however, create a false dichotomy if we assume, as Nygren seems to assume, that the only alternative to the rejection of Platonism is supine Hellenizing. Students of Dionysius in our own time are as conscious as students of Origen, Augustine, and the Cappadocian Fathers that Christians who derived their beliefs primarily from the Bible and ecclesiastical teaching in antiquity often looked to the Greek philosophers for a key to the resolution of obscurities, omissions, and apparent contradictions in the Scriptures for which the Scriptures themselves offered no elucidation. Dionysius, like the others whom we have named in the previous sentence, was primarily an exegete: he was not any less a Christian if he also wished to commend philosophy to his fellow-believers, to save his old school from the ban that fell upon it in 529, or to persuade the pagan students in that school that Christianity was not the religion of fools.

The theism of the later Neoplatonists—and theism in the full religious sense it was, be it polytheism<sup>4</sup> or monotheism—encompasses the separable but intertwining sciences of theology, theodicy, and theurgy. The present discussion is arranged under these three headings, taking Proclus in each case as the most eminent representative of Neoplatonic doctrine in the age of the Areopagite, and arguing that in each case he assigns to a number of agencies the powers and operations which Dionysius, in company with the Church at large, assigns to one agent only, or (to put it more dogmatically) to a Godhead constituted by three persons equal in power and dignity.

## THEOLOGY

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Theology in classical Greek means sometimes prophetic discourse about the gods (often phrased with mythological obscurity, sometimes the elucidation of myth as allegory, and sometimes, thanks to Aristotle, the philosophical quest for the ultimate principles of being, which (again thanks to Aristotle) we are accustomed to call metaphysics. In the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus, the last sense is paramount, although provision is made to accommodate both the others by: (1) the initial postulate of an ineffable source of goodness and unity; (2) the identification of being with the noetic or intelligible; (3) the devolution of being through the triad of existence, life, and intellect; and (4) the postulation of a participable unity below the transcendent One, which corresponds to the realm of the gods in popular worship and poetic myth:

1. For every Neoplatonist the first principle has two appellations, the 'One' as in the *Parmenides* and *Philebus*, and the 'Good' as in the *Republic*;<sup>5</sup> but only for Christian

readers, or for those who forget to put off the spectacles of Christianity, does this principle take the form of a God who is either one or good. The first antinomy of the Parmenides argues that 'if the One it can have neither parts nor predicates, since to speak of either creates plurality. Plotinus and his followers extend this reasoning to the exclusion of being itself from the One, and interpret its goodness and unity as the power to confer these predicates on all things to which existence can be ascribed. The first principle is thus a progenitive cause, inasmuch as unity produces multiplicity and goodness is predisposed to superabound,<sup>6</sup> and a final cause inasmuch as every being strives for identity with its own essence and the fulfilment of the end that is proper to it. When we conceive the first principle in itself and not as cause, however, we can say of it only what it is not.<sup>7</sup>

2. True being, as all Platonists agreed, is to be found in the realm of forms or ideas, each of which is always and necessarily identical with its essence. In the *Timaeus* *nous* or intellect is a designation for the artificer or demiurge who fashions the world in the image of the paradigm, or realm of forms, which contains the archetypes of all natural kinds.<sup>8</sup> In Neoplatonism *nous* or intellect itself is the seat of forms, and hence of being or essence.<sup>9</sup> Since the forms are coterminous with the demiurgic mind that contemplates them, the subject and object of knowledge are in substance one; for all that, the polarity of knowing and being known remains, so that *nous* is at once a unity and a dyad. Its principle of unity must therefore lie beyond it, and Platonic epistemology confirms the metaphysical necessity of postulating the unconditioned One.
3. The paradigm is the formal cause, or pattern, of creation in *Timaeus*, while the efficient cause of the Demiurge; in the less mythological diction of the *Sophist*, 'life' is the term that signifies the dynamic propensity of intellect to communicate form to matter. In the *Philebus* Socrates defines being as a mixture of two contraries, limit and the unlimited, both proceeding from the One. It is probable that all these texts coalesce in the formulation of two triads which furnish the scaffolding of the intellectual world in the successors of Plotinus.<sup>10</sup> In the *Chaldaean Oracles* the three terms are *hyparxis*, *dunamis*, and *nous*—existence, power, and intellect—while in the Gnostics, Iamblichus, and Proclus they are *hyparxis* or *ousia*, *zoê*, and *nous*—existence/being, life, and intellect—the order being codified by Proclus with the argument that *nous* pertains to all rational entities, *zoê* to all that are sentient (including, of course, the rational), and being to everything that exists, whether sentient or non-sentient.<sup>11</sup> He also correlates being or existence with the noetic or intelligible (i.e. the object of intellection), *nous* with the noeric or intellectual (i.e. the subject of intellection), and life with an intermediate category, the noetic-and-noeric.<sup>12</sup> With the exception of Marius Victorinus, a late convert from Platonism, there appears to be no Christian who differentiates the three persons of the Trinity according to this model: for Dionysius, as for Augustine, being, life, and intellect are expressions of Godhead in its unity.
4. From Iamblichus onwards, the Neoplatonic tradition maintained that, since there is no participation in that which has no parts, a participable unity must be

intercalated between the primordial One and the contents of *nous*. It is not clear whether Proclus was the first to characterize this mediation of absolute unity by adopting the rare term 'henad' from the *Philebus*,<sup>13</sup> but he is certainly the first author whose extant works define the peculiar manner in which the henad is both one and the One. Since the One to which every individual and all things as a totality owe their unity is not one, the first subject of this predicate is the henad. The henad is participable where the One is imparticipable, but the realm which it inhabits does not yet admit of the difference which appears, in contradistinction to sameness, at the level of *nous*.<sup>14</sup> Consequently its relation to the One, and to other henads, is closer to identity than to any other relation that we can express. Every henad is in a sense the One and is distinct from other henads but without difference. To participate in the henad is thus the highest possible appropriation of unity; at the same time, in order that participation may not destroy the unity of that which is participated, there must be one henad of *nous* (for example) and another of soul.

Point (4) not only adds another plane to the ontology of Plotinus but introduces a strain of demotic religiosity which Plotinus disavows in his allegorical readings of the ancient poets and his audacious dictum 'The gods should come to me, not I to them' (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 10.45). For Dionysius there can be no divorce between theological and philosophic approaches to the knowledge of God, for the substrate of philosophical reflection is God's revelation of himself in Scripture. For him, as for any Christian it is God who is (1) the One and the Good; (2) the lone occupant of the plane of Being; (3) the first exemplar and primordial source of existence, life, and wisdom; and (4) the henadic Trinity who is known to the theologian, as to the laity, by no other means than his own accommodation to our capacity and condition:

1. While they made free use of privative epithets for God, augmenting the pagan lexicon with Philo's neologisms, Christians also favoured the appellative *pantokrator* (omnipotent, almighty) which savoured less of the first than of the second antinomy of the Parmenides: 'if the One is then everything can be predicated of it'. Moreover they had inherited a biblical vocabulary which implied that God is capable of love, of hatred, of anger, and of willing into existence that which he might have willed to be otherwise. This they could not discount or explain away by allegory; Lactantius affirms that his wrath is as real as his love, and that neither is inconsistent with his incorporeality, his ineffability, or his impassibility. Dionysius gives lucidity to a hitherto turbid tradition in his *Mystical Theology*, maintaining that the negative or apophatic epithets must be balanced against the positive or kataphatic epithets, and that while the latter contain more untruth than the former, their very falsehood is a corrective to any temptation to take the negative epithets for propositions.
2. For Christians there is no question of denying existence to the God who revealed himself as I AM<sup>15</sup> (or as Philo has it, he who is), just as there is no question of denying unity to him of whom both Moses and Christ proclaimed: 'Hear, O Israel,

the Lord our God, the Lord is one.<sup>16</sup> Origen may be the author of the variation on Plato which sets God above both intellect and being, yet for the most part he represents him as the supreme existent. In Dionysius too the dictum that God is superior to existence and non-existence is peculiar to the mystical theology,<sup>17</sup> while the *Divine Names* casts no doubt upon the accuracy of the formula 'He who is'.

3. The triad of being, life, and intellect was taken over, either from Porphyry or from the Gnostics, by the belated convert Marius Victorinus, whose refutation of Arius correlates being with the Father, life with the Son, and intellect with the Spirit. The one Latin author after him who shows knowledge of this triad is Augustine, who does not distribute its members among the persons, but asserts at *On the Trinity* 10.10.13 that existence, life, and intellection are activities of the Godhead as a whole.<sup>18</sup> When Dionysius alludes to the triad, the biblical substantive wisdom replaces intellect, and all three functions are once again exercised not severally but in unison by the three persons of the Trinity.<sup>19</sup> The three triads into which he divided the angels do not correspond to being, life, and intellect, let alone to the noetic, the noetic-and-noeric, and the noeric, but to Origen's three stages of scriptural pedagogy—ethics, physics, epoptics<sup>20</sup>—which Evagrius had interpreted for monks as the purgation of soul, the illumination of intellect, and the perfection of the image and likeness of God through contemplation.
4. The teaching of Proclus according to which each henad is identical in some sense with the One and yet distinct from other henads,<sup>21</sup> offers the nearest pagan analogue to the Christian understanding of the Godhead as a triad of discrete hypostases sharing one essence and constituting one God. For Christians, however, henad is a noun that has no plural. Origen, pre-empting both Iamblichus and Proclus in his retrieval of the noun from Plato, differs from all three of them in applying it directly to his first principle, God the Father, whom he also calls the monad.<sup>22</sup> Dionysius, for his part, styles the whole Godhead a 'tri-hypostatic henad'<sup>23</sup>—a coinage that could only have been a fruitless paradox in the school of Athens. 'Three in one' is not an impossible conceit for Proclus, but neither is it a possible denomination for the first principle.

## FROM THEOLOGY TO THEODICY

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We see then that in Christian thought a single plane of being, which is nothing less than Being itself, encompasses all the properties and functions which are assigned to at least two levels in the cascade which begins with the One. The One may be conceived with religious awe, but is not an object of cultic worship, not a datum of childhood faith awaiting the adult seal of ratiocination, not an agent who wills and loves into being that which might have been otherwise; and neither, although we can credit it both with existence and with demiurgic action, is *nous*, the supernal intellect. For Christians the first

principle is God not adjectivally but by name, while being and unity are the attributes concomitant with his supremacy: he attracts to himself the predicates that are conferred by philosophers on the highest principle, but his title to them would not be secure if they were not attested in the same Scriptures which also affirm the temporality and contingency of the world, thus bearing witness to the primacy of will in his operations and preparing us (as Christians urged) for unconditioned acts of love which belie any philosophical definition of his essence. The God who creates a universe from nothing and who makes himself a being of no account within that universe is neither the first nor the second One of the *Parmenides*.<sup>24</sup>

The tenet 'from nothing', endorsed by all Christian theologians after the second century, is regularly contrasted with 'from matter', the existence of this substrate being a precondition of demiurgic activity in all Platonic systems. And yet the secession from unity which is implied by the very being of *nous* is styled by Plotinus a *tolma* or act of temerity (*Enneads* 5.1.1): it is necessary, and therefore good, that the One should superabound, but it cannot be good in all respects to be other than the One. A similar ambivalence attends the procession of soul from *nous*: on the one hand, it affords a medium for the impression of the forms upon a lower realm of being, but on the other the declension of soul from *nous* entails loss of unity and therefore a greater tendency to error.<sup>25</sup> To say that they are seduced by matter is only a partial truth, for they would not succumb if they had not already begun to lose their native integrity.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Plotinus can speak of matter as the prime evil, and although this tenet was modified (as we shall see) in the later Athenian school, no Platonist could deny that matter marks the limit of being, and is therefore of all things the most bereft of any inherent good.

The opinions of Dionysius with respect to creation, matter, and the soul are never at odds with Christian orthodoxy, yet neither do they favour the sharp antitheses between pagan and biblical teaching that are drawn by other Fathers of the Church. He is the first Christian writer who makes regular use of adjectives formed with the prefix *hyper-* to signify God's superiority to all human attributes, and he also adds profusely to the existing stock of pagan and Christian adjectives which begin with the prefix *auto-*. It has often been remarked that he is imitating—or rather that he ostentatiously seeks to excel—the fecundity of Proclus, whose coinages from *hyper-* convey the supereminent character of the attributes of pure being, while those from *auto-* express the paradigmatic relation of these attributes to their homonyms in the sensible world. Perhaps it is not so often remarked that epithets of both kinds are reserved for the contents of the noetic realm, whereas the One, which transcends all being, can be spoken of only by negatives which are not attributions but indices of the impossibility of attribution. In Dionysius, as we have noted, terms which connote the absolute transcendence of being and predication sit beside terms connoting the reality of that which is predicated in a paradigmatic and supereminent manner. As we hope to have demonstrated elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> he does evince the same preference for *hyper-* rather than *auto-* that is characteristic of Proclus, and his own neologism tend to reinforce the Christian presupposition that God is known primarily not through abstract reasoning but through his revelation in Scripture and the world.



For all that, the Areopagite is reticent as to the origin of the soul and matter, and not even a clear assertion of a temporal creation or a creation out of nothing can be discovered in his writings. It is at least evident that soul is not a creator, not the dynamic aspect of *nous* in a lower plane of being: it is neither voluntarily nor involuntarily the parent of matter, as it seems to be in Plotinus.<sup>28</sup> It is rather a product of divine volition, invested by God himself with the capacity to attain his image and likeness, though not without prayer and liturgical service. It is capable of three motions, a circular reversion to itself, a linear approach to the neighbour, and a spiral ascent to God (*Divine Names* 4.9, 153.10–154.6 Suchla). In Plotinus, by contrast (*Enneads* 3.9), the three motions are directed to *nous* above, to matter below, and to the soul itself, and while all are proper to the soul, the second is also deleterious, as we have seen. Dionysius seems to have transferred to the soul the three modes of cosmic motion which Xenarchus the Peripatetic obtained by combining the heliacal course of the planets in the *Timaeus* with the linear and circular paths distinguished by Aristotle in *On the Heavens*.<sup>29</sup> This transference betokens the displacement of the cosmos by the soul as the proper object of theology, which if it is based on Scripture will acknowledge that it was in the soul alone that God placed his image, and not (as Plato imagined) in the cosmos as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

## PROCLUS: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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Proclus is the author of three treatises vindicating the goodness of the cosmic order and defending the gods against accusations of ignorance or neglect. They survive entire in the Latin renderings of William of Moerbeke, which are unfortunately poor specimens of the translator's art, as he not only coins a new term to represent the definite article but sometimes fails to capture the idiomatic sense of a verb and frequently produces incomprehensible constructions by his servile imitations of Greek syntax. The reader's difficulties have been partly alleviated by Helmut Boerse's discovery of large portions of the original in the writings of Isaac Sebastokrator;<sup>31</sup> Isaac has not, however, been wholly faithful in transcription, omitting many passages which offended his orthodoxy, suppressing the names of pagan deities and occasionally adding a commentary of his own. It is he who asserts, for example, that Proclus' treatise *On the Reality of Evils* is a paraphrase of the excursus on the same question by Dionysius,<sup>32</sup> thus revealing that the likeness between the two authors was already so obvious in the first millennium as to leave no doubt that one had appropriated the thought of the other. At the same time, a comparison of the two texts will expose some striking differences, not least in their asymmetric understanding of the role of love.

The first question addressed by Proclus is whether evil has any substance, and it is clear at once that the answer must be in the negative (ch. 1). To say that whatever exists must partake of being is a tautology, and it is a Platonic axiom that being receives both

unity and goodness from the first principle. If, therefore, evil were to partake of being it must also partake of the Good; since, however, evil is the antonym of good, there can be no participation of one in the other (2). Only if we postulate some other principle than the Good could we admit the subsistence of evil; such a conjecture, however, is inconsistent with the unity of the cosmos unless we set the One above the Good as a principle of both good and evil. The goodness of the Demiurge overflows to all possible levels of existence, the lowest of which inevitably participate less in being than the highest (6). Non-being is present in them, not as an absolute, for the existence of absolute non-being would be absurd (7, p. 488), but as the qualified non-being, the disparity between existence and essence which makes it possible for a particular both not-to-be another particular and to change into something other than itself (8, p. 492). Thus evil, which has no being of its own, may nonetheless be present to that which has being—yet not to every occupant of the scale of being, as Proclus proceeds to demonstrate. The gods, since they exemplify henadically the goodness of the One, do not fall short in any way of perfection (11–13). The angels too are perfect in their own kind (14–15), and it now emerges as a maxim for Proclus that nothing which is perfect in its kind can be reckoned evil. Not even demons can be evil (16), for those appointed to punish wrongdoers are contributing to the order of the whole, and hence not evil in themselves, or even for those who are punished once the evil has been expelled from their souls (17). Subordinate to the demons are the heroes who display an irascibility that would be alien to a god, but is native to a being of this rank (18). By the same principle, fierceness in a lion is not evil, and neither is the impact of one body on another: that humans should be devoured by beasts or struck by weapons is not to be deplored when the death of the body conduces to the edification of the soul (19).

The irrational soul is naturally mobile and subject to passion, but is capable of accepting the *metron* or regulation of the higher soul (25.20). All being is an equilibrium, not a monadic unity, because being is constituted, as Socrates says in the *Philebus*,<sup>33</sup> not by a single procession from the one but by the conjoined procession of limit and the unlimited (28–29). The unlimited in the natural realm is matter (30; 35), but we cannot conclude that matter lures the soul into its descent.<sup>34</sup> If that were so, Proclus argues, we should have to conclude that soul is not free but subject to an external determination which belies its character as the source of motion (33.32). Ought we say that evil in the body is worse than evil in the soul? Yes, inasmuch as the evil in the body corrupts its substance, where evil may pervert the operations of the soul but cannot deprive it of its immortality (39.8–22). On the other hand, while it is true that *dunamis* or power is a function of substance and hence inferior to it, the *dunamis* of the soul stands higher in the scale of being than the substance of the body. Hence we may argue that evil in the soul, as the corruption of something greater, is a greater corruption than evil in the body (39.44–45). Neither in the soul nor in the body is evil itself a substance: it derives the appearance of substantiality from that which it inhabits, being weakest when it destroys the very substance of its host and strongest when it eats away the virtue but leaves the substance unimpaired (52.30–35).

## DIONYSIUS ON EVILS

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Nowhere are the fruits of Dionysius' study of Proclus more conspicuous than in the chapters of the *Divine Names* on the origin of evil. He begins with the axiom that the defining attribute of God is his goodness (*Divine Names* 4.1, 143.11 Suchla)—a biblical truth no doubt, but one that Plato too had invoked to account for creation and thus banish evil from the realm of being (*Timaeus* 29d–e). Dionysius borrows from *Republic* 509b a preposition and a simile when he likens the sun in our world to the God who is *epekeina*, superior to all of which we can know or speak (DN 4.4, 147.2–15). As the sun is known by the light which renders all other objects visible, so we know God, without being able to look on him directly, by the goodness that he disseminates to every order of being, from the most glorious of the angels to the most corrupt of demons, and the most ignorant of beasts. This is Plato's doctrine of the natural superabundance of the Good—or, as Dionysius says in an echo of Plotinus, of the power of God to communicate goodness, and therefore being, by his mere existence (4.1, 144.2–5). From God no evil can emanate, for that would imply that the good is not of his essence (4.21, 169.13–16); once we confess that everything is a product of his bounty, we must infer that even that which is evil partakes of the good insofar as it comes from his hand (4.7, 152.10–12; 4.20, 167.11–168.6). Even a depraved soul or a demon, so long as it has the power to do evil, participates in the good of being alive and of having the power to exercise its essential functions (4.23, 171.16–21). Insofar as a body is necessary for the sustenance of life and its operations, the possession of a body is not an evil (4.27, 173.17–174.3). The same may be said of matter inasmuch as it is constitutive of bodies; if it be objected that evil is the privation of good and that matter in itself is nothing but privation, it will not follow that matter is the cause of evil, for privation in itself cannot be a cause of any kind (4.28, 174.4–7; 4.29, 175.5–9).

Privation is always parasitic on being, as a consequence of some weakness in the agent; while the misuse of his agency must be blamed on his weakness, the agency itself is the proper and natural corollary of his place in the order of being, and in that respect is good. On the other hand, Dionysius attributes to his God a greater propensity to intervene in the world than any Platonist since Numenius would accord to providence (4.33, 178.3–17). Throughout his discussion of evil he reminds us that it is not because God neglects the world that the world has neglected God (4.35, 179.5–13). To such a privileged saint as Moses he shows himself as the light that transcends all form and hence can impart all forms to his creatures; the nations fail to discern him because of their weakness, just as they fail to apprehend his love because the everyday syllables which spell the word *erôs* suggest to them only carnal gratification (4.12, 157.18–158.6). The Scriptures substitute *agapê* for *erôs* (4.7, 150.16), although the Platonists will recognize their own vocabulary when they read of the synagogic and teleiotic operations by which he retires the unity of the cosmos (4.6.150.10). Sometimes the inspired commentators on Scriptures call God love, sometimes the object of love—the first insofar as he draws all

things towards him, the second insofar as he is the good and the beautiful, and therefore worthy of their desire (4.14, 160.1–11).

Of God Dionysius says in the words of Plato (*Symposium* 211a), that his beauty is not perishable, nor subject to growth or decay, nor present in one respect but wanting in another (4.7, 151.10–17). Yet neither is he to be credited with the indifference or inactivity of a mere object: on the contrary, divine love is ‘ecstatic’ in that it seeks no good of its own but only the good of its inferiors (4.13, 158.19–159.2). That *erôs* should be a property of the divine, and hence a mark of plenitude rather than of deficiency, is none the less inconceivable to all Platonists but Proclus, and even he says nothing of this downward-tending *erôs* except in his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*,<sup>35</sup> where he has to explain why Socrates approaches Alcibiades instead of allowing the pupil to come to him in accordance with the more usual practice. No Platonist could have made sense of the saying ‘my *erôs* is crucified,’ quoted from Ignatius (Romans 7.2) at *Divine Names* 4.12, 157.11 and applied by Dionysius to Christ himself; and when he construes the jealousy of God at Exodus 20.5 as the outpouring of his love upon those who seek him (4.13, 159.14–18), he cannot have forgotten that jealousy is a trait that Plato denies to the Creator (*Timaeus* 29e). And while Dionysius makes no explicit reference to the Trinity, the Pauline motto ‘from whom, through whom and in whom’ (Romans 11.36) is an intermittent refrain to his panegyric on the ubiquity of divine love (DN 4.4, 148.12–15; 4.10, 154.11 and 155.5–7; 4.14, 160.12). *Erôs* figures much less as a word for the soul’s aspiration to God than a reader of Nygren might have surmised, but frequent mention is made of the divine *erôs* which takes the place of Neoplatonic superabundance. Love is thus uncoupled in Dionysius from any notion of deficiency, and since it is the expression of an omnipotent will, it furnishes the only required condition for the existence of its object. Thus it performs for itself the role that Platonists give to matter as the complement of the One.

## PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN THEURGY

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We have found, then, that the God of Dionysius, inasmuch as he is also the God of Scripture, is at once the *Nous* or essence and the One or the Good of Neoplatonism, and therefore neither *Nous* nor the One as the Neoplatonists themselves employed these designations. Such a difference in the root and content of his theology could hardly fail to modify his understanding of theurgy, though he certainly imports this term into Christian usage from the school of Athens. Against some modern writers who have co-opted them as precursors of liturgical theology,<sup>36</sup> we must point out that Iamblichus and Proclus never speak of theurgy as a collective work, let alone as the work of a Church which indiscriminately mingles the rich with the learned and the idle with the poor. On the other hand, the assimilation of pagan theurgy to magic is clearly an error—an error made by Classicists before it was taken up by theologians<sup>37</sup>—since it never purports to achieve its ends through automatic forces or the intimidation of superhuman powers.<sup>38</sup>

The middle way between the sacramental and the sacrilegious caricatures of theurgy is to undertake a diligent and unprejudiced comparison of the Dionysian with the Platonic usage of the word.

In his theurgy, as in much else, Proclus is a disciple of Iamblichus, who is discussed in a previous chapter of this volume by Charles Stang. If anything, Proclus is still more eclectic than his master, and in his treatise *On the Hieratic Art* he maintains that for every deity there is an object in the natural world that will serve as an instrument of union;<sup>39</sup> in the *Platonic Theology*, by contrast, the role of the theurgist is to conduct the denizen of the noetic-and-noeric realm to that of the pure noetic, by devices which cannot be expressed in words (*Platonic Theology* 4.28.22.29.5). Theurgy is one of three modes of ascent, and whereas the way of the enthusiast is guided by love and that of the philosopher by truth, the tutelary virtue of those who take this third route is faith (4.29.4; 4.3.11–12). The word *pistis* no longer signifies, as in Plato, the enslavement of the intellect to its senses, but rather a humble willingness to seek knowledge of the rational through the irrational, of the animate through the inanimate, by methods which we cannot teach ourselves.<sup>40</sup>

Theurgy in Neoplatonism is therefore not a human artifice to force blessings from the gods, but a transaction in which pious souls secure divine favour by undergoing the purgative disciplines which the gods themselves enjoin. There is no facile antithesis to be drawn between pagan theurgy as a work of man and Christian theurgy as a work of God. Nevertheless, a contrast is apparent when we turn to Dionysius, for although theurgy is also for him a transaction between the human and the divine, it is almost always God who is characterized as *theourgōs* and the agent of *theourgia*, while the adjective *theourgikos* is reserved for the powers and activities that he delegates to his adepts. In the *Divine Names* the noun denotes not the art of theurgy but its operation, for *theourgiai* in the plural are ascribed, together with holiness, causality, and the dispensation of goods, to all three persons of the Trinity (DN 2.1, 127.7 Suchla); a second passage, which has already been quoted, distinguishes a divine from a human theurgy, but attributes the latter to the incarnate Second Person of the Trinity (DN 2.6, 130.5–7 Suchla). Another allusion to the human theurgy of Christ occurs in the *Celestial Hierarchy* (4.3, 23.3 Heil/Ritter), where angels are also credited on three occasions with knowledge of theurgies (7.2, 29.18, 29.23 and 30.8 Heil/Ritter). Yet neither here nor when they are said to reveal theurgic mysteries in the Ninth Epistle are angels represented as authors rather than witnesses of these operations (198.4 Heil/Ritter). In the last of these passages, *theourgōs* serves as an adjective, as it does again when it qualifies the communion of the intellect with the Spirit (EH 2.8, 78.18 Heil/Ritter), the beams that enlighten the saints from above (CH 15.9, 59.4 Heil/Ritter), and the radiance of the Godhead as it beckons to those who occupy the rank inferior to the primordial beings (EH 5.1, 105.1–2 Heil/Ritter).

The Dionysian corpus makes more frequent use of the adjective *theourgikos*, which is also more often applied to creaturely states or actions resulting from the *theourgia* of God. Angels may aspire to theurgic knowledge, through which it is possible to attain a theurgic likeness (CH 7.2, 29.11–14 Heil/Ritter); it seems that the revered teacher of Dionysius, Hierotheus, was able to communicate theurgic illumination (DN 1.4, 113.12

Suchla), although there is no doubt that God alone is the source of this. Both the noun *theourgia* and the adjective *theourgikos* are particularly salient in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, where the task of the priestly order is to manifest *theourgiai* and to celebrate them in hymns (1.5, 68.18 Heil/Ritter; 3.10, 90.9; 3.15, 94.13). This sacramental office is rendered possible by the human theurgies of Jesus Christ (3.4, 83.20 Heil/Ritter)—that is, his working theurgically in human flesh (4.12, 103.17–18 Heil/Ritter)—though we must not forget the superessential character of this action. Christ's theurgy is the root of the priest's theurgic holiness (4.12, 103.3 Heil/Ritter) and the means by which he himself becomes a *theourgikos* (1.5, 68.13 Heil/Ritter): the strengthening of the mind by theurgic principles (4.4, 99.6 Heil/Ritter) and the consecration of most theurgic myrrh (2.7, 73.5 Heil/Ritter) are effected not by human virtue but by the emanation of his theurgic rays (5.4, 107.3 Heil/Ritter).

## EPILOGUE, WITH A THOUGHT ON DAMASCIUS

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Dionysius asserts the absolute transcendence of God with all the vigour of Proclus, finding a number of new companions for the prefix *hyper-*. At the same time, he is bound to hold, on the evidence of the Scriptures, that the same God who transcends both being and unity is the God who says of himself both that he is and that he is one. Moreover, since one cannot deny the veracity of the Scriptures, one must hold that it is not only true that God is love or that God is light, but that these assertions are pre-eminently true of him. His solution to this antinomy is to argue that the apophatic tenets of philosophy must be balanced by the cataphatic testimonies of the Holy Spirit, including those that liken God to a stone or a drunken man (MT 2, p. 146.14 and 145.19–21 Heil and Ritter). The imparticipability of the first principle is not to be surrendered, yet the love with which this principle regards his own creation out of nothing permits even to transcend his own absoluteness and to be imparticipably participated. The capital instance of this love is of course the incarnation, which enabled a local body to contain the fullness of the unlimited Godhead. To perceive the visible in and beyond the visible is not to move beyond faith to truth or love, as a pagan might have opined, but to grasp by faith the God who descends to us under both these names.

Dionysius cannot be said to reject outright the Platonism of Proclus; he differs from him in holding that we approximate most closely to the truth about God, not by negation alone, but by the paradox of affirming in faith what we have denied by logic. The superessential God-who-is, the impassible God-who-suffers, is a stranger to those who identify the first principle with the subject of the first antinomy in the *Parmenides* of Plato. Anders Nygren is right to maintain that the imparticipable One is incapable of *agape*, the love which enables a personal being to overcome its own logical otherness for the sake of the other.<sup>41</sup> Does this imply that the paradox to which we have alluded



is no more than a euphemism for the illicit fusion of two incompatible systems?<sup>42</sup> To vindicate Dionysius from this charge would be matter for a second paper, but we can at least point out, by way of a coda, that it would not have been impossible for a graduate of the Academy to answer the criticisms of the Platonists from the same dialogue which informs their own teaching on the first principle.

While the first antinomy of Parmenides states that if the One is, nothing is predicable of it (*Parmenides* 142a), the second affirms the contrary, that if the One is, everything is predicable of it (155e). Proclus inferred that the subject of the first antinomy is the imparticipable One; his pupil Damascius argued that in the strict sense its subject is nothing, since that which is truly ineffable can receive no appellation.<sup>43</sup> The first principle which is properly to be styled the One is therefore the subject of the second antinomy, transcending all duality, and therefore comprehending at the same time all that is predicable of the One and all that is not.<sup>44</sup> Thus he can write *De Principiis*, I p. 84, 13–21 Westerink-Combès:

Is, then, the One unknowable in its own nature, even if the Unknowable is something other than the One?

But the One wishes to be on its own, associated with nothing else.

Now certainly that which is contradistinguished to the knowable is unknowable, whereas that which is beyond the One is absolutely ineffable, such as precisely we avow that we can neither know nor yet be ignorant of it, but grant that we are actually in a state of super-ignorance (*hyperagnoia*) in respect of it, the adjacency of which causes even the One to fall into obscurity. In fact, the One, being in the closest proximity to the inconceivable principle, if it is proper to put it this way, remains, as it were, in the sanctuary (*adyton*) of that Silence (*sigê*).

This is distinctively Damascian language, such as we would not find in Proclus, and it does seem to be reflected in certain passages within the Dionysian corpus. At the same time, it implies a complete disjunction between the ineffable and that which can be spoken of which, as we have seen, is foreign to Dionysius. This union in one God of the apophatic and kataphatic entails that the only way to knowledge of him is by unknowing. In the *Divine Names* (II 4, p. 126, 17–127, 1 Suchla), we find *agnôsia* attributed to God, in the midst of a cluster of negative, hyperbolic, and contradictory epithets, where it must mean not ‘ignorance’ (as in its common use<sup>45</sup>.) but ‘unknowability’. No such term is associated with the One in Proclus, but if we turn to Damascius, we find in ch. 13 of Book I of the *First Principles* a most interesting passage, at the culmination of a graded ascent to the Ineffable on the basis of ‘freedom from need’ (*to anendeēs*):

So then, we must search for something else, that will in no way have the character of a being that will be in need of anything whatsoever. This would be a being such that one would not be able to declare with truth that it is a principle, nor even this characteristic, generally agreed to be the most noble of all, of being absolutely devoid of any need (*anendeestaton*); for just this characteristic signifies a superiority and a transcendence in relation to need. In fact, we did not judge it suitable, as mentioned above (p. 21, 5–8 W-C), to describe it even as transcendent in respect of everything,



but rather as the absolutely incomprehensible and totally wrapped in silence (*pantê aperinoêton kai pantê sigômenon*), since this would be, on the justest reckoning, the characterization which our thought is in search of, at the stage where it is no longer prepared to make any utterance, but is content to make no utterance and in this way to do reverence to that unfathomable unknowability (*amêchanos agnôsia*) (*First Principles* I p. 39, 5–14 Westerink-Combes, trans. John Dillon for this volume).

Such a passage would indeed have pleased Dionysius, if, as I suggest, he was acquainted with it, as a fine negative characterization of the supreme principle—with the proviso that he himself is concerned to balance this with a series of positive characterizations (*agnôsia* is balanced with ‘complete intelligibility’, *to pannoêton*), arising from the fact that he is combining his absolutely unitary first principle with a trinity (to make a *henarkhikê trias*!).

These are straws in the wind which merit examination, though none, I suppose, which would constitute a ‘smoking gun’. At the same time Damascius is not Dionysius,<sup>46</sup> nor is Dionysius his apostle. The last Athenian Platonist has no theological concept of *agape*, and never imagines, any more than Proclus, that the One can become its other by an act of renunciation. In contrast to Proclus, he does at least grant that the One can be the subject of predications which are mutually exclusive in our logic. Dionysius, on the other hand, does not affirm that God is logically all that he is not, but he says in his own way what Damascius says in his, that once the limits of thought and being have been surpassed, we can no longer decree that everything must be false whose contrary has been shown to be true.

## NOTES

1. Professor Dillon contributed some pages on Damascius, which appear at the end of this chapter, but was too ill to proceed further.
2. See chapters in this volume on Luther and Lutheranism.
3. *Life of Isidore* 138 = Athanassiadi 1999a: 310.
4. See Butler 2014.
5. See *Philebus* 15a etc.; *Republic* 509b; Halfwassen 2006.
6. The source of this notion is the asseveration at *Timaeus* 29e–30a that the good will always strive to communicate itself.
7. See Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.10 etc.
8. *Timaeus* 48a; 28b–29b.
9. See Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 20, with Armstrong 1960.
10. See further Hadot 1960; Majercik 1992.
11. See *Elements of Theology* 101.
12. See Majercik 2001.
13. *Elements of Theology* 6 and 113–165; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.9.33 and Plato, *Philebus* 15a–16b.
14. On the indivisibility of the henad see Proclus, *Commentary on the Parmenides* 1220.
15. Exodus 3.14, at least in the Septuagint.
16. Deuteronomy 6.4, quoted at Mark 2.29 etc.

17. *Mystical Theology* 5, p. 149.6 Heil and Ritter.
18. See further Manchester 1992.
19. *Divine Names* 2.5, p. 129.1 Suchla; 2.7, p. 131.10; 5.1, p. 181.1–6.
20. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, p. 75 Baehrens. On Evagrius see Edwards 2021a.
21. See further Butler 2005.
22. *First Principles* 1.1.1, reproducing the locution of the *Philebus*; cf. *Divine Names* 1.4, p. 112.11 Suchla.
23. *Celestial Hierarchy* 7.4, p. 32.9 Heil and Ritter.
24. On this see further, in the section on Damascius.
25. See e.g. Rist 1961.
26. See Corrigan 1985.
27. See Edwards 2021b.
28. See Corrigan 2000.
29. See Falcon 2011: 28–30, with Aristotle, *On the Heavens* 268b and *Timaeus* 38e–39a.
30. Note *Timaeus* 92c, where the cosmos is the *eikôn monogenês* of the intelligible.
31. Ed. H. Boese, as in bibliography of primary texts.
32. Paparella (see bibliography of primary texts), 464.
33. 16d, quoted at *On the Reality of Evils* 34.12.
34. See further Opsomer 2001.
35. See especially p. 55.14–15 Segonds. Socrates here represents the daemonic rather than the divine (p. 62 etc.).
36. See Pickstock 2005: 163.
37. Dodds 1951: 283–285.
38. See Shaw 2003; Pavlos 2019: 154–157.
39. Bidez 1928: 139–151.
40. *Platonic Theology* 1.112–113 and 4.28–29; *Commentary on Parmenides* 927.17–23.
41. Nygren 1930.
42. Corsini 1962 contends that Dionysius applies the theses of the first and second antinomies to the same god. See further Radde-Gallwitz 2010 against proposals to divide these theses between two aspects of the Dionysian God.
43. *First Principles* 1.16.16–1.8.5; 1.10.22–24; Van Riel 2010: 677. See also Athanassiadi 1999b: 166–168.
44. *First Principles* 1.5.2–17; 2.39.8–25; Van Riel 2010: 679. The chapter divisions are those of Westerink and Combès (see bibliography of primary sources).
45. There is one interesting Platonic usage of the word, in the *Menexenus* (238d6: ἀγνώστια πατρῶν), where the word has to mean rather ‘obscurity (of parentage)’ and this provides some minimal warrant for the usage we are about to examine.
46. Pace Hathaway 1969: 26–29.

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SECTION II

DIONYSIUS  
IN THE EAST

## CHAPTER 11

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# DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE IN SYRIAC

*The Translation of Sergius of Resh'ayna  
(Sixth Century)*

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EMILIANO FIORI

THE crucial importance of Sergius of Resh'ayna's translation for the history of the Dionysian Corpus can hardly be overestimated. Not only does this translation appear in the earliest manuscript containing the Areopagitic writings, as we see later on; most importantly, it also represents the earliest stage of textuality of the Corpus accessible to us. Sergius' text is not accompanied by any scholia, since it antedates John of Scythopolis' commentary; it attests a peculiar order of the treatises (*Divine Names-Heavenly Hierarchy-Mystical Theology-Ecclesiastical Hierarchy-Epistles*) and a more articulated division of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* into eighteen chapters that no other version of the Corpus attests; this, however, is comprehensible if one thinks of the peculiar articulation of each chapter of EH into a description of the rite and its 'contemplation', i.e. the illustration of its symbology. The numerous titles of the Syriac version mainly describe these subdivisions.

For all these reasons, Sergius' version deserves special attention and care. The first step into the study of this translation is a look at the circumstances of its appearance. It is Sergius himself who informs us in a passage of his ascetical treatise, the *Discourse on Spiritual Life*, that 'this book was put into our hands in order for us to translate it'.<sup>1</sup> He thus explicitly declares that he was appointed to translate the Corpus, and also adds that he was assisted by a certain Stephen.<sup>2</sup> Before Sergius set out to this work, however, one isolated passage of the Corpus had already surfaced in Syriac twice in the translation of two polemic tracts of Severus of Antioch against Julian of Halicarnassus made by Paul of Callinicum not later than 528.<sup>3</sup> Paul must have translated these quotations directly from the Greek, such as he found them in Severus' text; they certainly do not depend on Sergius' translation, from which they diverge significantly.<sup>4</sup> These citations,

both consisting in a single Christological passage from DN II, 9 (133.5–9), are the first appearance overall of the Areopagitic writings, and they stem from an unmistakably Miaphysite milieu. Dionysius' second appearance in history, and, as it were, his first public appearance, was at the Conversations held at the palace of Hormisdas in Constantinople in 532. Justinian had summoned Chalcedonians and Miaphysites, inviting them to discuss their positions in the hope of reconciliation between them. In a letter to Justinian, attested by the Syriac Miaphysite historian known as ps.-Zachariah,<sup>5</sup> the Miaphysite bishops attached a patristic florilegium in support of their stance, also including a short Christological passage from DN I, 4 (113.6–12). It is a well-known fact that this citation prompted the first doubt to arise concerning the authenticity of the Corpus, expressed by the Chalcedonian bishop Hypatius of Ephesus. Another important, although hardly ever remarked-upon feature of these conversations with regard to Dionysius, is the presence among the Miaphysite attendants of the bishop of Resh'ayna, a certain Peter, as we learn from another report of the conference written by Innocentius, the Chalcedonian bishop of Maroneia.<sup>6</sup> Innocentius' mention of Peter of Resh'ayna is not the only one: he also appears in the same *History* of ps.-Zachariah in connection with Sergius of Resh'ayna. Indeed, ps.-Zachariah is the only author who gives us some precious biographical details on Sergius. In the ninth book of his *History*, he devotes a long note to Sergius:

It happened in those days that Sergius, an archiatros of Resh'aina, went up to Antioch in order to accuse Asylus, the bishop, making known to patriarch Ephrem that he had been injured by him. He was a man of eloquence and trained in the reading of many books of the Greeks, and in the teaching of Origen. He had read in Alexandria for some time the commentaries of the other teachers on Scripture—he was able to read and speak Syriac—and books on medicine. He was of his own will a believer, and the prologue and the very apt translation of Dionysius that he made, and the treatise that was written by him concerning the faith, that he wrote in the days of the believing bishop Peter, bear witness. However, this Sergius was lascivious in his many sexual encounters out of desire for women; he was incontinent, unchaste, and greedy with love of money. Ephrem examined this man, and finding him to be experienced, promised to do for him anything he asked, if he would be sent from him to Rome with letters for Agapetus, the head of the priests [there], and return. He accepted [...] and carried the letters to Agapetus. [...] Agapetus came with him to Constantinople [...] Sergius the archiatros suddenly died there, and Agapetus died after him in those days.<sup>7</sup>

This information about Sergius is telling as far as the Dionysian Corpus and the theological leanings of its Syriac translator are concerned. Indeed, Sergius is termed a 'believer', which in ps.-Zachariah's language means an orthodox Miaphysite. He had lived and worked during the episcopate of the Miaphysite bishop Peter; moreover, the historian explicitly believes Sergius' translation of the Dionysian Corpus to be a demonstration of the archiater's Miaphysite orthodoxy and a service rendered to the Miaphysite cause. With these clues at hand, we have some valuable evidence to argue,



firstly, for a scenario where Peter of Resh'ayna made acquaintance with the Dionysian Corpus at the Collatio of 532 and became aware of the good service the Dionysian Corpus could render to the Miaphysite cause, probably because it provided it with an important apostolic authority. Thus he entrusted its translation to the highly cultivated, bilingual physician-in-chief of his city, Sergius, who also happened to be a Miaphysite by his own choice, as ps.-Zachariah says. If this hypothesis is right, then, the corpus was translated into Syriac between 532 and 535, as in 536 Sergius was busy travelling around the Mediterranean and then died. Moreover, secondly, this handful of events involving the Corpus all univocally point to a preponderant Miaphysite interest in Dionysius in its very first years of public existence, when Dionysius' few Christological passages were clearly felt as supporting the Miaphysite Christology. As a matter of fact, the first evidence of any Chalcedonian, or better Neo-Chalcedonian approach to the Corpus—the edition and scholia of John of Scythopolis—date to after Sergius' and Severus' deaths in 536 and 538, that is, after the death of the major Miaphysite authorities connected with Dionysius in the earliest years of the Corpus. It also significantly dates it after the definitive break between Justinian and the Miaphysites following the condemnation of the latter at the Synod of Constantinople of 536. Indeed, as it appears, John started to work on Dionysius only after 537.<sup>8</sup> These are scarce and extrinsic, but significant hints at a possible provenance of the Dionysian Corpus from the Miaphysite anti-Chalcedonian party.<sup>9</sup> A further intriguing piece of information on Sergius provided by ps.-Zachariah is that concerning the archiater's readings, especially on 'the teaching of Origen.' This led some scholars<sup>10</sup> to assume that ps.-Zachariah was thereby implicitly accusing Sergius of Origenism, hence the historian's harsh words on Sergius' vices. However, the rhetorical structure of ps. Zachariah's sentence ('He was of his own will a believer ... However, this Sergius was lascivious ... and greedy with love of money') indicates that the accusation turns on Sergius' betrayal of the Miaphysite cause on the occasion of his mission for the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, Ephrem. This was viewed by ps.-Zachariah as the fruit of greed, as it implied the renunciation of an intimate persuasion ('of his own will'). The information on Sergius' interest in Origen, then, remains in itself neutral. Needless to say, reading Origen was far from being an innocent activity in the sixth century, and yet one must not confuse 'heresiological' Origenism, such as the opinions condemned at the fifth ecumenical Council in 553 or the Syriac *Book of the Holy Hierotheus* (on which see more later), with the sheer interest in Origen and with, as it were, a 'catholic' usage of Origen and also of Evagrius. The latter was the case in both Chalcedonian and Miaphysite authors such as Philoxenus of Mabbug, Dorotheus of Gaza, and Sergius of Resh'ayna himself who merged Origen and Evagrius in his *Discourse on the Spiritual Life*, although significantly enough without mentioning either of them.<sup>11</sup> This digression on Sergius' alleged but non-existent 'Origenism' is of relevance insofar as a widespread scholarly opinion has so far believed the Syriac version of the Corpus to reveal an allegedly original Origenist form of the Areopagitica; this opinion, however, is untenable for various philological, linguistic, and theological reasons that will be succinctly expounded below.

## THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT TRADITION

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The text of Sergius of Resh'ayna's translation, of which the first part consisting of DN, MT, and Ep is available in a critical edition,<sup>12</sup> is preserved in a single manuscript of the end of the seventh century or at the latest the beginning of the eighth century, which is preserved at the Monastery of Saint Catherine of Sinai (Sinai Saint Catherine Syr. 52, 119 ff. on two columns). The manuscript lacks the first and the last folios, but almost all of these have been recovered<sup>13</sup> in Milan (Biblioteca Ambrosiana A 296 Inf., f. 86),<sup>14</sup> in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France Syr. 378, ff. 43–54 + 42),<sup>15</sup> and at the Saint Catherine monastery itself.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the whole quire discovered at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France included the beginning of the Corpus (i.e. the first three paragraphs of DN), and Sergius' own important *Discourse on Spiritual Life*, which served as a preface to the Corpus. The findings (small fragments of parchment) at the Monastery of Saint Catherine mostly come from the last leaves of Sinaiticus 52, and contain some passages from epistles 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Some further whole leaves from the beginning of the manuscript found at Saint Catherine contain other paragraphs from Sergius' introductory treatise. Besides this almost intact witness to Sergius' translation, it was possible to discover some excerpts, especially whole epistles, in a considerable number of dogmatic and ascetic anthologies contained in manuscripts ranging from the seventh to the twentieth centuries, mainly at the British Library in London and within the Mingana Collection at the Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham, plus a small monastic anthology in the manuscript Sinai Saint Catherine 24.<sup>17</sup> These fragments could thus be collated with the main manuscript, and sometimes they helped improve the quality of the text with better variant readings.

More importantly, however, some of these passages allow us to reconstruct the text itself of relevant parts of epistles 7 to 10, of which we would otherwise have nothing but the small Sinai fragments. The tenth and last epistle, for example, is almost completely lost from the Sinaiticus except for the heading, but the first half of it can be recovered from one London manuscript. The eighth epistle is largely recovered from four London manuscripts and one Mingana manuscript. A second feature is the fact that almost all these fragments recur from one anthology to the other: the same Christological passage from DN II, 9, for instance, is quoted in four manuscripts; each of two passages from epistle 8 recurs in three manuscripts. This points to an early excerption of short passages from Sergius' translation; what was excerpted mostly deals with concrete and/or controversial topics (ecclesiastical order, Christology), whereas the text as a whole must have been left aside because of its too-speculative character. In the case of epistle 9, the same set of five fragments recurs in two London manuscripts, the excerpts being in both cases connected to one another at exactly the same points through the formula *w-tūb* ('and again'): this clearly indicates an anthological use of the text, and the avoidance of a direct reading of the long epistle as a whole. To this we must add a scarce indirect tradition, especially in the East Syriac tradition: direct quotations from Sergius' translation can

be found in Babai's *Commentary* on Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostika* (MT I, 3 and II; DN IV, 11), in the first collection of Isaac of Nineveh, discourse 22 (DN IV, 11), and in Joseph Ḥazzaya's *Book of Questions and Answers* (DN IV, 11). Quotations are more frequent in the West Syriac tradition, but West Syriac authors usually quoted from the later Syriac translation of the Corpus made by Phokas of Edessa (end of the seventh century);<sup>18</sup> according to the current state of research, only in one case, Moshe bar Kephā's *Treatise on the Soul*, is epistle 8 quoted from Sergius' version.

## PHILOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES

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No exhaustive stemmatic presentation of the textual tradition of the Corpus is available yet: Beate Regina Suchla promised a volume entirely devoted to this issue, but it has not yet appeared. Thus one cannot establish the position of Sergius' version exactly within this tradition. A comparison between the critical editions of Suchla, Ritter, and Heil and the text of Sergius' translation, however, allows for an approximate assessment of the latter's philological value. One also has to take into account the obvious fact that Sergius' work has its own intellectual and stylistic idiosyncrasies, and that using it to reconstruct the Greek text underlying it is a risky endeavour. The awareness that a translation is first of all a question of cultural and linguistic choices is highly relevant to the study of Dionysius overall. Indeed, a widespread opinion, inaugurated by István Perczel in a number of pioneering studies on the Syriac Dionysian Corpus and its relations with the Origenian tradition, affirms that the underlying original Greek text reflected by the Syriac version significantly differed from the modern critical text. According to Perczel, the original Greek Corpus displayed an Origenist doctrine that was later censored by John of Scythopolis, who would have expurgated the text through his editorial activity and his commentary; the term 'Origenist' meaning a line of thought that would resemble the ideas condemned by the anti-Origenist anathemas of 553.<sup>19</sup> The Dionysian Corpus, resorting to the *disciplina arcani* to avoid censorship,<sup>20</sup> produced a philosophical codification of these doctrines; thus even in John's expurgated version, Origenism would still be recognizable through an appropriate decoding. The first issue of this interpretation is that the passages Perczel used to demonstrate Dionysius' alleged Origenism can always be read in a different way.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, this interpretation also has a major methodological issue, since it grafts a historical speculation onto a philological hypothesis, which was formulated by Beate Suchla.<sup>22</sup> Since many manuscripts of the Dionysian Corpus have 'Doppellesarten', i.e. equally good variant readings in the body and in the margins of the text or between the lines, Suchla suggested that John of Scythopolis, besides commenting the Corpus, also produced an '*editio variorum*' of it. Few years after the appearance of the Corpus, a number of different variant readings, perhaps going back to the author himself, must have already been circulating. John must have collected them, putting one reading in the body text and one in the margins or in the interlinear space; some scribes did not choose between the variants, thus causing the phenomenon

of the 'Doppellesarten' occurring in some Dionysian codices, while other copyists made a choice. Thus it is evident that Suchla's reconstruction is limited to strictly philological remarks, and does not transcend the observation of linguistic facts that do not substantially involve the content. Perczel starts from these remarks, and from his own reading of the Dionysian Corpus as an Origenist work, to affirm that John did not only prepare a 'Redaktion' of the Corpus, as Suchla puts it, but also produced an expurgated version of it, where the most evident Origenist elements are expunged in order to make Dionysius readable for a wider audience.<sup>23</sup> Sergius' translation, antedating John's editorial work, would have thus preserved the original, esoteric redaction of the Corpus.

This reconstruction is hardly tenable, especially for two reasons, which coincide with the main features of Sergius' translation: 1) its non-Origenist character; and 2) its language and style, which do not seem to presuppose a Greek model dramatically different from the critical text we now have, whose 'encoded Origenism', as stated earlier, is itself questionable. These features will be expounded in the following paragraphs.

## Sergius' Non-Origenist Lexicon

Far from showcasing any Origenist sympathy, the Greek Corpus as we read it is itself an anti-Origenist work at its very theoretical core, which John of Scythopolis could not have edited away without writing a completely different work. Those features that may seem to have an Origenist flavour in the Greek Dionysius must rather be interpreted in the opposite direction.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, echoes of Origen and Evagrius can actually be detected in Dionysius;<sup>25</sup> however, whenever Dionysius evokes their teachings, he does it with the aim of toning them down by remodulating them within the frame of his strict hierarchical worldview based on order, harmony, and the necessity of the mediation of hierarchies to achieve any individual progress towards God. Indeed, Origen's presence in the Dionysian Corpus must be interpreted within the larger frame of Dionysius' overall plan, which is to defuse and discipline extremist interpretations of Origen's and Evagrius' ideas on spiritual progress.<sup>26</sup> Such extremist interpretations seem to have been widespread in Dionysius' times in Syria and Palestine; Dionysius thus does not directly react to Origen's or Evagrius' thought, but to an extremist evolution of the Origenian tradition, and especially of Evagrian protology and eschatology, such as it is attested by the Syriac pseudo-epigraphic *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*.<sup>27</sup> In this work and in the doctrine it displays, a drastic spiritual progress brings the intellect of the individual ascetic to a straightforward 'Christification' and to the complete dissolution of the sacramental authority of the earthly Church. This appears as the ultimate evolution of Origen's idea of spiritual progress, and is the reason why the Dionysian corpus is deeply marked by an oppositional confrontation with Origen, the Origenian tradition, and its key themes.

A careful study of Sergius' Syriac version, far from revealing an Origenist Vorlage (i.e. the Greek original underlying it), supports these assumptions. Indeed, his translation, being written in Syriac, the same language as the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*, allows for a comparison between the two texts on the lexical level. Such a comparison produces

surprising results, as it demonstrates that the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus* and Sergius use the same terminology in key semantic fields like that of mixture, and that the *Book's* aim<sup>28</sup> in doing this is evidently to confront itself with Dionysius. Sergius reproduces Dionysius' characteristic terminology of mixture, which describes the presence or lack of harmony and hierarchical order in the cosmos: order is tantamount to a good state of mixture, κρᾶσις (in Sergius' Syriac *mūzzōgō*); this condition, also described as 'union' (ἔνωσις, in Sergius *ḥdōyūtō*), is opposed to a bad mixture (in Sergius *ḥbīkūtō*, corresponding to the Greek root μίγ-), which is equal to confusion (σύγχυσις, in Sergius *būlbōlō*). The *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*, on the contrary, uses the same terms *ḥdōyūtō* and *ḥbīkūtō* with the patent intention to assert the superiority, and the opposition, of its own teachings to those of the Areopagite. Indeed, whereas in Sergius' version *ḥbīkūtō* is the bad mixture inferior to the couple *ḥdōyūtō*–*mūzzōgō*, Hierotheus affirms *ḥbīkūtō* as the highest possible way of relation with God; this can be reached only by transcending *ḥdōyūtō* with Him, which is considered as an inferior degree of spiritual progress. Thus even in its Syriac form, the Dionysian corpus confirms itself as the 'orthodox' pole in a confrontation with Origenism, whereas it is the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus* that makes an Origenist use of the Dionysian language.

## Sergius' Stylistic Peculiarities

These arguments against an interpretation of Sergius' version as reflecting a now lost original (and allegedly Origenist) Greek Vorlage of the Corpus are further substantiated by the close and organic analysis of Sergius' language and style in the Dionysian translation. Indeed, such an analysis confirms that Sergius' model was quite similar to the current Greek edition, not only from the point of view of content as shown in the earlier few paragraphs, but also as far as the overall wording is concerned. As stated above, Sergius has his own style and makes his own intellectual choices.

In general, it has been observed that Sergius' version is much more readable than the original Greek.<sup>29</sup> This has also been interpreted as a clue to a different Vorlage, which allegedly was easier to read than the Greek we now have.<sup>30</sup> Not considering the fact that Dionysius' style, although notoriously complicated, is accurately crafted throughout and intentionally baroque, Sergius was a translator and had to introduce Dionysius' Neoplatonic idiom into Syriac, a language that did not have a developed philosophical terminology nor could reproduce the intricacies of the Dionysian syntax. Moreover, as we shall see, Sergius' translation is highly representative of the intermediate period in the history of Syriac translations from Greek: it shows the remarkable mix of closeness to the original and lack of slavishness that is typical of this phase, covering the end of the fifth century and the first half of the sixth.<sup>31</sup> This means that in general nothing of what is in the original is absent from the version; but the latter is not yet a neutral mirror of the former. Translations from this period are still very much reader-oriented, but they are nonetheless more Greek-oriented than were the versions of the earlier period. It is not surprising, then, that such a reader-oriented setting leans towards the simplification of

the dense Dionysian style. Thus, Sergius' better comprehensibility is rather a choice of the translator than a criterion to attest that he had a better Vorlage.

If one delves into the details of Sergius' language as compared with the modern edition of the Greek, four possible situations can occur:

- a. Sergius and the modern critical edition simply overlap. This is the most frequent case.
- b. Sergius and the Greek diverge, but the divergence can be explained, either on the basis of stylistic devices that consistently recur throughout the translation (and in other works of Sergius') or on the basis of Sergius' personal theological and philosophical views. The latter is the case, for instance, when Sergius minutely edits Dionysius' biblical quotations and allusions,<sup>32</sup> or in some other isolated circumstances like Sergius' interventions on Dionysius' logical terminology, on which he had a long experience as a commentator of Aristotle's *Categories*.<sup>33</sup>
- c. Sergius and the Greek diverge, and the divergence cannot be explained; this can happen, although quite rarely, because Sergius misunderstands the Greek. But in most of the cases, the divergence follows fixed patterns, as we shall see.
- d. Sergius offers better variants, which always coincide, however, with Greek variants given by the editors of the Greek text in their apparatuses.

Points b, c, and d, then, show that the Greek and Sergius actually can diverge; but it must be stressed that the vast majority of differences do not entail any dramatic change in the meaning of the original text such as we know it—all the more so when they are explicable as Sergius' interventions. Some are difficult to explain and may sometimes point to a Greek Vorlage different from any form of the text that has come down to us. But, again, none of these divergences affects the content. Two features of Sergius' translation style, namely editing and lexicon, can illustrate this. 'Editing' here means any interference with the original text as to both wording and content. This topic is always difficult to tackle since it can often be unclear whether a difference from the original must be considered as an actual variant reading, or it is a personal elaboration of the translator, or a defect of the unique manuscript witness of Sergius' translation. Relevant cases of editing applied to the content are fairly rare, and the great majority of them are well explained through Sergius' personal theological and philosophical ideas, as indicated above in point b.<sup>34</sup> Linguistic editing, to the contrary, is much more frequent but can be limited to a certain number of categories. In the most unclear cases, no evident reason can be detected for a difference between the Greek and the Syriac. An example of this is the highly frequent inversion in the Syriac of the word order of the Greek, mostly in lists, without any apparent stylistic, syntactic, or contextual reason, since the sense does not change. Another recurrent case is the divergence in number between Greek and Syriac, from singular to plural or vice versa. It also happens, and fairly often, that Sergius seems to omit words that are present in the Greek text we have. This, however, may also be due to troubles in the transmission of the Syriac translation itself.



Although these three cases occur frequently, they never seem to convey any particular meaning. More interesting is what can be recognized as detectable trends within Sergius' personal style. Indeed, a typical (and more comprehensible) intervention is the addition of single words, which is highly pervasive. This is often due to Sergius' effort to render the nuances of Dionysius' dense vocabulary through more than one word. The most characteristic example is Sergius' constant rendering of Dionysius' participle ἐξηρημένη (referred to the Godhead in its transcendence) by different Syriac phrases of two terms, in order to express both the preverb ἐξ- and the sense of the verb: see e.g. DN I, 4,115.18, where the term is translated as *mabād wa-mbarray*, 'far and removed'; or DN I, 5,117.4 where it receives a slightly different rendering, *prīš wa-mbarray*, 'separated and removed'. The same happens in MT with the technical term ἐξαιρούντες, which denotes the apophatic activity of removing any attribute from the Godhead; in MT II, 145.5 the participle is rendered by Sergius as *pōršin w-nōsbīn*, 'they set apart (translating ἐξ-) and take away (translating αἰρούντες)'. This stylistic device is particularly cherished by Sergius insofar as he also shows (and not only in the Dionysian translation) a personal tendency towards a distinctively Semitic figure, the lexical doublet, a sort of hendiadys. This has already been observed for Sergius' translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*,<sup>35</sup> but also in Syriac translation technique in general.<sup>36</sup> These doublets are usually not idle duplications, but help Sergius develop a complex meaning which is implied in the Greek word; a good example is provided by the participle ἀνανεάζουσα, 'renewing', in DN IV, 6,150.4, where Sergius adds to the simple translation of the Greek, *m'allmō* ('[the Good] makes young'), the term *mḥaddtō*, 'makes new'. Sergius evidently perceives here, or wants to add, an allusion to the Peshitta text for the Greek καὶνὰ ποιῶ of Rev. 21:5. The doublet serves to render a biblical reference that Sergius perceives in Dionysius' text. Sergius also tends to play with etymologies or with simple root assonance, so that now and then he chooses a word on the base of the possibility to make it resonate with other words in the surrounding sentences or phrases (an instructive example combined with the technique of the doublet translation is the etymological play on ἀποπληρώσει in DN XI, 5,221.3 which is rendered by the doublet 'accomplishment and plenitude' (*b-šūmlōyō w-mūllōyō*).

A substantial number of the divergences from the modern edition of the Greek are due to recognizable periphrases or paraphrases, which also serve to simplify dense phrases or words, through more articulated Syriac expressions (a very representative example is the difficult word ὑπερουσιότης, which is rendered in a number of different ways, once for instance through the periphrasis 'Excellence of essence over against all essences' (*m'alyūt itūtō d-men kūll ūsiyas*). In the case of the periphrasis it is particularly easy to see that the underlying Greek text does not differ from the form we still read, for the periphrasis makes Dionysius' style more legible but does not add nor remove any element of meaning. The paraphrase is more puzzling, since it *does* add, remove, or even change some elements of the original meaning, and enriches with new elements the corresponding Greek concepts: to which, nevertheless, it remains akin. For example, in DN I, 5,116.11 we read the Greek couple ἐπιβολὰς καὶ παραδοχάς, in reference to the particular way angels are united with God. This is a strictly idiomatic terminology of



Greek philosophy, and ἐπιβολή in particular means an active leap of the mind towards God: we find it for instance in Plotinus; παραδοχή entails the opposite, passive meaning. Sergius paraphrases both: the first as ‘intellectual movements’, *zawē yōdūē*; the adjective is an addition indicating the active character of the ἐπιβολή. Παραδοχή is rendered by the paraphrase ‘spiritual mixtures’ (*mūzzōgē rūlōnē*), and here, too, the adjective is added by Sergius. Another case is that of DN II, 9,134.2, where it is said that Hierotheus, Dionysius’ alleged teacher, had a privileged contact with God, οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα; παθὼν becomes *b-nesyōnō hwō bhēn w-īda’nēn*, ‘he was in them and knew them [i.e. the divine things] by experience’. Here Sergius’ wording is completely different from that of Dionysius, but Dionysius’ idea is still readable under Sergius’ formulation. Paraphrases are considerably less numerous than periphrases in Sergius’ version, since they are more typical of the earlier, freer style of Syriac translation. Both periphrasis and paraphrase are ideal examples of how Sergius makes Dionysius’ discourse more comprehensible for the Syriac reader, and contribute to the impression of an easier readability of the Syriac text as compared to the Greek original without pointing to an easier original.

Another major question regarding Sergius’ attitude towards translating is the attention he pays to lexical equivalence: he is overall attentive to it and is fairly consistent as to what he perceives to be technical terms. Yet this is not properly a rule that the translator imposes on himself, but a tendency; in many cases, we come across different kinds of interference factors that blur the equivalence. The first and foremost of these factors is Sergius’ attention to the context. He does not always establish a 1:1 correspondence to render a single Greek word, but more frequently has a 1:2 correspondence depending on the context: an example is the word νοῦς, which is translated with *maddō* (‘mind’) or *hawnō* (‘intellect’), depending on whether the intellect is a heavenly or an earthly one.<sup>37</sup> Another important factor of interference is that some Syriac roots are perceived as equivalent, so that they are indifferently used to translate the same Syriac word: for example, when translating a compound word in ὑπερ-, that is the most common of Dionysian compounds, Sergius does not seem to make any difference between the roots *ly* ‘superior’ and *rwm* ‘high’. The lexical equivalence can also be overcome by stylistic reasons, most of all in those cases where Sergius plays with sounds and roots. For instance, in DN XI, 2,219.20 we observe that the word ‘peace’ is *šaynō* instead of the more usual *šlōmō*, because close to it we can find the participle *mšannē*, ‘to change, alter, remove’, thus because of a sheer assonance.

Christology can serve as a good example of Sergius’ attitude towards a meaningful semantic field in Dionysius’ language. The presentation of this complex topic will be far from exhaustive and will touch exclusively upon some relevant hints at Sergius’ attitude, faithful and yet at the same time free in the rendering of such a delicate point. Indeed, in a certain sense Sergius diverges from the letter of Dionysius’ text, but by doing so he also lets emerge from the original a line of thought that is present in it but is less recognizable in Greek as it is usually concealed in Neoplatonic disguise. A most significant passage is to be read in DN II, 10 in Sergius’ translation:

he [Christ] also came to nature (*damō l-kyōnō*, ἕως φύσεως) on account of his loving benevolence; and although he had been truly begotten and had become human, he, who is God above all ... in those [characteristics], too, possessed the height of the *ousia* (the Greek word in Syriac, but τὸ ὑπερφυές in Greek) and the excellence of the essence (*m'alyūt itūtō*, τὸ ὑπερούσιον). Not only on account of the fact that, although he participated himself to us without confusion and change, his over-fullness was not diminished by his ineffable emptying; but also, and this is newer than every new thing, [because of the fact] that, although he became into all the [characteristics] of our nature (*b-küllhēn d-kyōnan*, ἐν τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἡμῶν), he was above nature and above *ousia* (the Greek word in Syriac), just in the [characteristics] of our humanity and in all our [characteristics], which derive from us, and he was higher than us.

As can be observed, Sergius uses the language of 'nature' (Syriac *kyōnō*) much more abundantly than the Greek, which tends to privilege the language of οὐσία, 'essence'. As is well known, the nature-related terminology was highly controversial in the Christological debates of the fifth and sixth centuries; thus, whereas Sergius does not hesitate to use it, Dionysius opts for a more neutral ontological language. However, Dionysius' terminology in the Greek original of DN II, 10 proves that this seeming divergence is not the fruit of an arbitrary choice of the translator; see for example the phrase ἐν τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἡμῶν ὑπερφυῆς ἦν, 'he was supernatural [even] in our natural properties', where the terminology of 'nature' is explicitly used in the Greek—and faithfully rendered in Syriac, *ōp kad hwō b-küllhēn d-kyōnan l'el men kyōnō itaw(hy) hwō* although he became into all the [characteristics] of our nature, he was above nature. This equivalence is so clear to Sergius that, inversely, he even opts for a rendering of the Greek root of φύσις by the loan word *ūsiyō* (=οὐσία). The Areopagite is not always so clear in this respect as in DN II, 10, which is rather exceptional. Indeed, in this passage the term 'nature' unusually appears many times already in the original (ἕως φύσεως ἐλήλυθε ... τοῖς φυσικοῖς, τὸ ὑπερφυές, ὑπερφυῆς, the latter two etymologically corresponding to Syriac *l'el men kyōnō*). The Areopagite normally tends to reduce the force of the term 'nature', by alternating it with a more markedly philosophical couple: οὐσία-ὑπερούσιος, together with the verb οὐσιώω; this is the case also in some phrases of DN II, 10. This terminology, although it seems abstract, is used by Dionysius to mean the concretely existing reality of this world.

Thus if on the one hand Dionysius conceives of the concrete incarnation as God's (be) coming into our nature, since the way in which the Word becomes human is described as 'coming to our nature' (ἕως φύσεως ἐλήλυθε), on the other hand, this becoming is also described as οὐσιώθη, 'he took on an essence'. This confirms that for Dionysius οὐσία and φύσις are synonyms. Sergius' strategy consists in highlighting this equivalence, making the presence of the Syriac root *kwn*, which conveys the meaning of 'nature', more pervasive than is that of φύσις in Greek. Indeed, Sergius is very consistent in transforming any occurrence of the οὐσία-related language into terms based on the root *kwn*, but in doing so he develops an equivalence that already underlies the original text of the Corpus. The same idea of DN II, 10 is also formulated in ep. 4, 160.9–12 in the same terms. Sergius' translation sounds: 'He who is always above nature ... really

came to being and he was made nature above nature and he did also the actions which are proper to human beings above human beings' (*haw da-b-küll zban itaw[hy] l'el men kyōnō ... 'etō ba-shrōrō l-hōwyō w-ettkin l'el men kyōnō wa-s'ar ōp hōlēm da-bnay nōshō l'el men bnay nōshō*). In this case the concepts of nature and supernatural are completely dissimulated in the Greek through the terminology οὐσία-οὐσιώω-ὑπερουσιότης. Sergius, however, consistently uses the *kwn*-‘nature’ language. Thus the character of Sergius’ intervention, which renders all the Dionysian ‘essence’ vocabulary in terms of ‘nature’ (without betraying, as we have seen, the original intention of the author) is further confirmed: Jesus’ becoming human, which in the Greek sounds ‘he took essence beyond essence’, becomes in the Syriac ‘he was made nature above nature’. This biunivocal Greek-Syriac equivalence of nature versus essence consistently recurs in the rest of the meagre Dionysian Christology as attested in the group DN–MT–Epistles 1–5: in MT III, 146.7–8, the formulation is highly synthetic (ὁ ὑπερουσίος Ἰησοῦς ἀνθρωποφυϊκαῖς ἀληθείαις οὐσιώται), but in Syriac it maintains the two extremes of the contrast *kyōnō*—*l'el men kyōnō*, ‘nature—above nature’, corresponding to the Greek polarity οὐσία—ὑπερουσιότης; in this case, the semantic field of ‘nature’ reappears in Greek as well, but hidden within the monster adjective ἀνθρωποφυϊκός. Sergius, according to his habit, is more explicit and renders the verb οὐσιώται as Jesus’ ‘becoming nature’: ‘and the essential Jesus, even if he was above the natures, became nature (*ettkin*) according to human measures’. In DN I, 4 we find once again the same concept (DN I, 4, 113.9–12): ‘the simple Jesus was composed, and he took up a temporal extension and came to our nature, he who is beyond all the orders that are in all natures, while also possessing without change and without confusion the stability of the [properties] of His essence’. Once more, Sergius vocabulary consistently hinges on the root of nature, *kwn*, whereas Dionysius makes exclusive use of the language of οὐσία.

By way of conclusion, it will be interesting to mention in passing that if one takes the equivalence οὐσία–φύσις established by Sergius seriously, and reads Dionysius’ Christological passages in the light of this equivalence, one is led to observe that the Dionysian Christology closely resembles that of a major Syriac Miaphysite thinker, Philoxenus of Mabbug. This similarity, however, cannot be investigated here.<sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

These few examples suffice to bring to the fore the complexity of Sergius’ approach to the corresponding complexity of the Dionysian text. They also demonstrate that a careful reading of the translation suggests a high degree of caution before postulating any strong divergence between the Syriac version and the Greek text as we read it, especially when it comes to theological points. The example of Christology has illustrated this clearly: even in this case, where Sergius really seems to alter Dionysius’s neutral language of the *ousia* into the highly controversial *physis* terminology that had upset Christianity for more than a century, the Syriac and the Greek do not really differ in meaning. In conclusion,

then, it does not seem legitimate to think that John of Scythopolis' edition of the Corpus, whose aim was to stabilize the textual transmission after the first years of uncontrolled tradition of the Areopagitica, also aimed at censoring a 'heterodox' Ur-Corpus that in its turn would be more faithfully reflected by Sergius' translation. The textual form reflected by Sergius' version, on the contrary, is not significantly different from what we read today in the critical edition. A close and organic reading of the Syriac text and of its stylistic devices does not support the idea of any censorship exerted on the Corpus. The existence of an original Vorlage, so different from the one we read now as to even have a marked Origenist character, is thereby excluded.

## NOTES

1. Sherwood 1961: 112; Fiori 2008: 36.
2. Perczel's hypothesis that this Stephen was Stephen bar Sudaili, the alleged author, or at least the inspirer, of the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*, is intriguing but difficult to maintain. The Dionysian Corpus is clearly directed against the extremist Evagrian teaching represented by the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*, which in its turn, by its very eponym, intends to present itself as conveying a teaching superior to that of the Corpus. See especially Fiori 2017: 205–215.
3. See Fiori 2014c: 169–172.
4. Fiori 2014c: 170–172.
5. *Hist. eccl.*, IX, 15, 119 (textus t. II); the text is published in Brooks 1919–1921.
6. *Innocentii Maronitae Epistula de collatione cum Severianis habita*, 169 (in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* IV).
7. *Hist. eccl.*, IX, 19, 136–137 (textus t. II); English translation from Greatrex et al. 2011: 368–371.
8. According to Rorem and Lamoureaux 1998: 38. Their *terminus post quem* remains convincing, despite the criticism it raised (Lourié 2010: 163, quoted approvingly by Nigra 2019: 117–118).
9. The hypothesis put forward by Arthur 2008: 138 and 184–187 that Sergius himself may have been the author of the Dionysian Corpus is untenable, insofar as even a superficial analysis of the translation reveals that Sergius at times misunderstood the text, and sometimes also re-interpreted it against Dionysius' intentions (e.g. the cases of biblical and logico-philosophical editing mentioned later in this essay).
10. Perczel 2008 was the first to put forward this hypothesis: 'From the Ecclesiastical History of Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, we learn that Sergius was a follower of Origen and belonged to the Origenist movement' (Perczel 2008: 30). This statement is not justified by the brief hint in ps.-Zachariah. King 2011: 208, has taken this hypothesis for granted ('The church historian ps.-Zachariah criticized Sergius of Resh'aina for being a follower of Origen').
11. On this question see Fiori 2014a: 63–67.
12. Fiori 2014b. Previous editions: of MT I in Hornus 1970 and of EH IV in Strothmann 1977–1978.
13. For a complete reconstruction of the manuscript see Fiori 2014b: XVI, summarized in Géhin 2017: 105–106.
14. Géhin 2006: 37–38.

15. Briquet-Chatonnet 1997: 69–77.
16. Brock 1995: 101–105, and 227–230, ill. 230–237; Philothée du Sinai 2008: 607–608.
17. On which see Kessel 2010: 209 and n. 17.
18. On which see Hornus 1970, and the much more precise assessment of Wiessner 1972.
19. These are edited in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* IV.1, 248–249. On Dionysius’ alleged Origenism see especially Perczel 2001.
20. Perczel 2008: 565.
21. See especially Fiori 2011a: 34–38.
22. Suchla 1985.
23. Perczel 2008: 566.
24. This has been demonstrated in a series of articles, especially Fiori 2014a.
25. See Ilaria Ramelli’s contribution to the present volume.
26. On this idea see Lettieri 2000.
27. Edition with English translation in Marsh 1927.
28. Or the aim of a later interpolator of the *Book*: see Sassi 2019, who considers the references to Dionysian concepts in the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus* as interpolations.
29. Brock 1989: 30.
30. Perczel 2008: 563.
31. Besides the classic Brock 1983, see King 2008 and my own remarks in Fiori 2014c, XXVI–XCI.
32. Fiori 2011b: 189–190; and Fiori 2014c, LXXXV–XCI. The editing usually consists in a normalization of Dionysius’ Neoplatonizing reformulation of biblical episodes, especially that of Moses in MT I, 3, and more generally in the capillary use of the Peshitta even when it diverges from the Greek Bible.
33. Sergius wrote one commentary and one introduction on Aristotle’s *Categories*: for the former (still unpublished) see Hugonnard-Roche 2004: 165–231 and Watt 2014; on the latter, the edition with translation and commentary in Aydin 2016. Fiori 2011b: 192–193 provides examples of logical editing in Sergius’ Dionysian translation.
34. On these cases of content editing see Fiori 2010 and 2011b.
35. McCollum 2009: 171–173.
36. Poirier and Sensal 2009: 312–313.
37. Fiori 2014c, LVIII and LXIII–LXIV.
38. This has been outlined in Fiori 2014c, LXV–LXX, and will be thoroughly analyzed in a forthcoming article.

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## CHAPTER 12

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# NOTES ON THE EARLIEST GRECO-SYRIAC RECEPTION OF THE DIONYSIAN CORPUS

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ISTVÁN PERCZEL

THIS essay aims to trace the earliest known reception of the Dionysian Corpus in a bilingual, Greek- and Syriac-speaking environment in the early decades of the sixth century.

To speak about the Greek and the Syriac receptions separately would give a misleading picture and, often indeed, it pragmatically gives such a picture. The two have been interwoven so closely that they are virtually inseparable. While beyond any reasonable doubt, the corpus had been composed in Greek and in a Greek-speaking environment, it was translated very promptly, simultaneously with its public appearance in the Greek-speaking world, into Syriac. The *terminus ante quem* for this translation is given by the death of the translator, Sergius of Reshaina, chief physician: AD April 536.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, most of the testimonies on the first Greek reception are preserved in Syriac. The close entanglement and the almost-simultaneous nature of the two receptions seem to be due to the fact that the milieu where the Dionysian Corpus made its first public appearance was bilingual. This has marked the character of the two reception histories, so that the two ‘Dionysian traditions’ separated only much later. In what follows, this essay introduces the main actors and events in the early sixth century, when we first hear about the appearance of the deep theological summary of the Athenian disciple of Paul, which later revealed to be, if not an outright forgery, then a literary fiction, which has engaged Christian and even non-Christian thinkers ever since. Its fascination has not ceased for over fifteen hundred years. As such, it can be considered a very early and *very* successful performative piece of avant-garde art.

## SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH AND JOHN BAR APHTONIA

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It is generally claimed that the first mention of the Dionysian Corpus was made by Severus of Antioch (c. 459–538, patriarch of Antioch from 512, in exile and hiding from 518), from whom three citations are extant, two in his polemics against Julian of Halicarnassus (*fl.* c. 520), citing a Christological passage from the Divine Names—extant only in the Syriac translation of Paul of Callinicum<sup>2</sup>—and one in his third letter to a follower called ‘John the Abbot’. Of the latter only two Greek fragments are extant in the *Doctrina Patrum*,<sup>3</sup> where Severus cites and explains the last words of Dionysius’ Epistle 4: [Jesus] ‘being God-become-man, he conducted for us a kind of new god-manly activity’.<sup>4</sup>

The letter to ‘John the Abbot’ is very difficult to date,<sup>5</sup> while the two anti-Julianist quotations can be safely dated between the years 518, when Severus was removed from his see and went into hiding, and 528, when his treatises against Julian were translated into Syriac.<sup>6</sup> It is understood that ‘John the Abbot’ (Ἰωάννης ὁ ἡγούμενος) was a close collaborator and follower of Severus. The title in the *Doctrina Patrum*, ‘From the third letter of Severus to John the Abbot’ can be interpreted as being his third letter from a letter collection, or as being his third letter among many to John. Both interpretations were proposed, but the first version is more probable.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Severus’ letters—according to the estimation of E. W. Brooks, over 3,824 pieces—were arranged in collective volumes and numbered.<sup>8</sup> Thus, this letter to ‘John the Abbot’ could be the third in one of the collections. The identity of this ‘John the Abbot’ has not been addressed systematically, as far as we know, in the literature. In the surviving collections, several of Severus’ letters are addressed to two ‘Abbot Johns’, who were living close to the city of Qenneshrin and whom he considered as his representatives.<sup>9</sup> In a footnote of his *Pierre libérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite*, Ernest Honigmann proposed to identify this addressee with John bar Aphthonia,<sup>10</sup> a close friend of Severus, serving first, from approximately 518, as the abbot of the Monastery of St Thomas near Seleucia Pieria, and then—after the expulsion of the Miaphysite monastic community from there in 528/31—as founder and abbot of the Monastery of Qenneshre on the Euphrates, the very monastery that would become the centre of Syriac Orthodox learning.<sup>11</sup>

We have positive evidence both on John being called ‘John the Abbot’ (ܝܫܬܐܢܐ ܐܒܬܐ) and on the correspondence between him and Severus. In fact, the sources usually mention him as ‘John the Abbot’, without the indication of the monastery over which he presided. He is called ‘John the Rhetor, the Abbot, son of Aphthonia’, in Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor’s *Chronicle*, where it reports on the colloquium of Chalcedonian and Miaphysite bishops held in Constantinople in 532. At this event, among important Christological matters, the authenticity of the Dionysian Corpus was first discussed and the first counterarguments

to the authenticity were raised. John bar Aphtonía was a member of the Miaphysite delegation, consisting of six or seven bishops and a number of accompanying clerics.<sup>12</sup> Also, he served as the secretary of the delegation, who noted the proceedings of the meeting, or perhaps wrote a memoir about the entire visit of the bishops, which lasted for over a year according to Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor. Pseudo-Zachariah is also one of the two witnesses to preserve the *Apology for the Faith*<sup>13</sup> of the Miaphysite bishops, a dogmatic statement containing a Dionysian fragment (DN I. 4, Suchla 113, 6–12)<sup>14</sup> and formulated in a vocabulary heavily influenced by Dionysius<sup>15</sup>:

When this *libellus*<sup>16</sup> of the *Apology for the Faith* was handed over and read to the emperor, and much discussion was conducted for the no little time of over one year<sup>17</sup> by the faithful bishops who assembled there, as it was written above, at the command of the emperor in the imperial city, and as John the Rhetor, the Abbot, son of Aphtonía (ܝܫܬܝܢ ܒܢ ܐܦܬܘܢܝܐ) was together with them and noted these down, the emperor did not ban the Council of Chalcedon from the Church but, in a *libellus*, he summoned the holy high-priest Severus, who was hiding in diverse places, and who excused himself in a letter sent to the emperor for not coming to visit him.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, in the *Anonymous Life of Severus*, composed between 538 and 543, John bar Aphtonía is called 'John the Abbot' and we read there that it was to him that Severus sent his last letter:

From this point on he [Severos] was alone, and he had none of his own notaries to write [for him], so by his own hand he wrote a very long letter to the venerable and excellent *John the Abbot*, called *son of Aphtonía*, and through the latter to all the monasteries of the East concerning the union, brought about by him, between the venerable Theodosios and Anthimos, bishops of Alexandria and Constantinople. In this letter Severos prophesied a double prophesy concerning [both] his own demise as well as of the one to whom he wrote. [ ... ] The venerable John lived fifteen days after he received this letter and afterwards departed to Jesus who was beloved to him.<sup>19</sup>

As John died on the 4 November 537,<sup>20</sup> Severus' last letter to him must have been dated the 20 October. The anonymous life of John bar Aphtonía writes about the same event the following:

Since he has 'accomplished his race and kept the faith' (2 Tim. 4:7), he received a notification on his deliverance and departure through another great prophet, who wrote to him a last letter. When he received and read this letter, he placed it on his eyes and said the blessed words of Simeon: 'Lord, may you now deliver your servant in peace according to your word!' (Luke 2:29)—and he lived for another fifteen days.

So, this letter was the last piece in a correspondence between Severus and John bar Aphtonía. In one of his letters, addressed to 'Andrew the Reader and Notary', Severus mentions a letter he had sent to 'Father John [the son] of Aphtonía', in which a Greek grammatical construction caused a difficulty of understanding to his addressee.<sup>21</sup> Finally, one of the addressees of the 'Abbot John-s' residing in Syria in close contact with

the bishop of the city of Qenneshrin (Chalcis), to whom Severus addressed a number of letters,<sup>22</sup> might well have been John bar Aphthonia. In one of those letters, Severus switches from the plural to the singular to express his joy for the recovery of his correspondent from a lethal disease,<sup>23</sup> and we learn from the *Life of John* that the latter was almost continually sick: 'one illness followed the other'.<sup>24</sup>

John was perfectly bilingual, and his hymns, originally written in Greek, were copied and translated into Syriac together with those of Severus. The monastery of Qenneshre, which he founded around 530, is not to be imagined as merely a house of prayer and asceticism but as a monastic school, which was to become one of the cradles of the Syriac reception of Classical Greek culture, philosophy, and science, and one of the principal links for the transmission of Greek philosophy to the Arabs. Its scholars taught a curriculum including Aristotelian logic and science, and culminating in Dionysian metaphysics. This Dionysian interest might have originated in the founder, John bar Aphthonia and his circle.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, we can ascribe to the Letter to John the Abbot the approximate period between 518 and 4 November 537, the date of John bar Aphthonia's death. Yet, whether 'Third Letter' means third in a collection, or third addressed to John in an extensive correspondence, one may reasonably suppose that its composition is closer to the date 518 than to the death of the addressee. As we will see in the following, the Constantinopolitan colloquium, in which John took part, will permit us a closer dating. Moreover, as Severus writes in this letter that he had dealt extensively with the subject of the 'new god-manly activity' earlier, we may suppose that he could have dealt with the issue, and thus could have known the corpus, even before 518, or shortly after that. Independently of the question of the date, all this gives an indication of the nature of the circle which discovered, sometime in the first decades of the sixth century, the Dionysian Corpus, accepted it as a theological authority, and used it for formulating its theology. This was a close-knit bilingual, Greek- and Syriac-speaking circle of erudite Miaphysites, including Severus himself, who saw farreaching intellectual possibilities in exploiting this literary fiction, which they considered the genuine work of the first-century convert of Apostle Paul.

## THE FIRST SYRIAC TRANSLATOR: SERGIUS OF RESHAINA

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Almost contemporary with the appearance of the Greek Dionysian Corpus in Severus' circles is the first Syriac translation of the corpus by the most important translator of medical and philosophical texts of the period, Sergius of Reshaina (*d.* AD 536). Intuitively, one would think that these two receptions are not independent of each other. However, does this hypothesis stand to reason?

About the life of Sergius, we know fairly little. There is a rather hostile note about him in the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor<sup>26</sup> and a laudatory one in the Prologue to the second Syriac translation of the corpus by Phocas bar Sargis of Edessa (684/6), written c. 150 years after Sergius' death.<sup>27</sup> Pseudo-Zachariah's note is then repeated in the

*Chronicle of 846* (written a little later than this date), in the *Chronicle* of Michael Rabo (Michael the Great: 1126-1199), and in the *Ecclesiastic History* of Bar ʿEbroyo.<sup>28</sup> Besides these, there are scanty notes in the Syriac/Arabic *Chronicle* of Elias of Nisibis (975-1049), in the Arabic *Universal History* of Agapius of Manbij (dated to the 940s), in a letter of Catholicos Patriarch Timothy I (727/8-823) and in the *The Metrical Catalogue of Syriac Writers* of Abdisho bar Brikha of Nisibis.<sup>29</sup> All these are later testimonies and add very little to Pseudo-Zachariah's hostile information.

According to Pseudo-Zachariah, Sergius was a chief physician (ἀρχιατρός, ܐܪܚܝܐܬܪܐ) and was from the city of Reshaina.<sup>30</sup> Also:

He was an eloquent man, who practiced the reading of many books of the Greeks and of the teaching of Origen. For a certain time, he was also studying in Alexandria the interpretation of the books of other teachers – he knew also Syriac, both reading and the speech<sup>31</sup> – and the medical traditions.<sup>32</sup> According to his confession, he was a believer, as is testified to by his Prologue to and translation of Dionysius, which he accomplished with great accuracy, as well as by the treatise that he wrote on the faith in the time of the celebrated Peter, the believing bishop.<sup>33</sup>

After this rather positive and informative introduction, there comes a series of accusations of greed and sexual depravation, apparently to explain why later Sergius accepted the commission of the Chalcedonian patriarch Ephrem to serve as his envoy to Rome, to invite Pope Agapetus to Constantinople. Agapetus, accompanied by Sergius, arrived in the capital in March 536, a move leading to the condemnation and deposition of the Miaphysite patriarch of Constantinople, Anthimus, and to the expulsion of Severus and the stylite monk Zura from Constantinople in May 536. Yet, before this happened, both Agapetus and Sergius died, Agapetus on 22 April, and Sergius somewhat earlier.<sup>34</sup>

From the perspective of the present investigation, Pseudo-Zachariah's note is priceless, as it adds an important, though hitherto generally neglected, element to our knowledge about the earliest reception of the Dionysian corpus. First, we learn that Sergius, who was from the city of Reshaina, was having the rank of a chief physician. This rank originally designated a court physician but later was extended to mean a physician of high standing who enjoyed tax immunity and was paid under the condition that he was also teaching.<sup>35</sup> This element in the note was understood in the scholarly literature as if Sergius were employed by the city of Reshaina,<sup>36</sup> which is far from being obvious (see note 30 above). He was apparently a fan of Origen, but also of Evagrius of Pontus, as we can see from his Prologue to the Dionysian Corpus. He studied in Alexandria, apparently philosophy and medicine, as it is obvious from his translations and can be deduced from the note. Then, Pseudo-Zachariah states that Sergius, 'according to his confession, was a believer' – that is, a member of Severus' Miaphysite circle. For this statement, two proofs are adduced: the Prologue to and translation of the Dionysian corpus, which are both extant, and a lost *Logos on the Faith*, apparently a defense of the miaphysite faith, written in the time of Peter of Reshaina, one of the members of the Miaphysite delegation at the Constantinopolitan colloquium of 532. As these are the only theological writings/translations made by Sergius, and as Pseudo-Zachariah praises the 'accuracy' of the translation, which can only mean theological accuracy here,

one might reasonably suppose that the translation was commissioned by the circle that had discovered Dionysius and that it was serving Severus' theological purposes. They might have asked him to do so, as he was an established translator and as his 'being a believer' warranted the theological accuracy of the translation.

It also seems that Severus was in correspondence with Sergius. J. R. Martindale, in the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*,<sup>37</sup> suggests that Sergius of Reshaina might be identified with the addressee of three letters of Severus. The first, no. 31 in the Letters edited by Brooks in PO 12, p. 92, is addressed to Sergius, 'physician and sophist' (*āsyā w-sofistā* corresponding to the Greek *ιατρός καὶ σοφιστής*, or *ιατροσοφίστης*), and two later letters nos 85 and 86 in PO 14, p. 310 and 316, to someone called Sergius, 'comes and chief physician' (*komis w-arhiyatrā* corresponding to the Greek *κόμης καὶ ἀρχίατρος*). Brooks thinks that the two persons may be the same. The designation *ιατρός καὶ σοφιστής* or, rather, *ιατροσοφίστης* (*ιατροσοφίστης* meant an expert in both the outside philosophy and medicine) perfectly fits Sergius the translator who – as we have seen, studied these disciplines in Alexandria. There comes the question of 'comes and chief physician' (*κόμης καὶ ἀρχίατρος*). Both *comes* designating a high-ranking imperial officer and *archiatros* were members of the imperial administration. We have seen that Pseudo-Zachariah explains Sergius' mission of bringing Pope Agapetus to Constantinople by Sergius' bad character and greed. What he does not say though, is that this must have been an imperial mission of high level, its ultimate commissioner being Justinian, be it through the intermediary of the Chalcedonian Ephrem. A *comes*, a member of the imperial bureaucracy paid from the imperial treasury, could hardly refuse the task. This also explains, better than Sergius' alleged greed and depravity, why a faithful member of Severus' circle accepted the mission. Pseudo-Zachariah also alleges that a personal enmity between Sergius and Asylus, the successor of bishop Peter of Reshaina, had played a role, which is perfectly possible.

Chronologically, the next witness about Sergius is Phocas bar Sargis of Edessa, a Miaphysite translator, who, in his Prologue to his new translation of the Dionysian corpus written in 684/6, writes the following:

[BL 12.151, 1v] When I was studying this writing, that we hold in our hands, of the holy Dionysius from the Areos Pagos, *which was translated long time ago from the Greek language to the dialect of the Syrians by the venerable and learned Sergius, a presbyter and chief physician*,<sup>38</sup> which we Syrians were all reading, I was stupefied<sup>39</sup> and exulted because of its lofty ideas, that is, its divineness, which in truth is worthy of stupefaction. However, when I found [2r] hidden ideas that are above [the understanding of] the many, I remained in uncertainty concerning these, perhaps with the exception of a few of them, namely those which I received, because of the purity of their meaning, as a very bright ray, so that I was searching even the rest, internalizing the knowledge of their ideas perhaps more intensely than others in our generation. Then, finally – as I said above that, from the investigation of and practice in the holy books, every day a new light is springing up due to the divine providence, for those who are meditating upon them – there came into the hands of my humbleness this holy book, mentioned above, written in Greek characters. In this, there are admirable scholia, that is, explanations of the words whose meaning, as I said above, is difficult to tell, written by an orthodox man, worthy of good memory. He was a



lawyer (*skolastiqā*, σχολαστικός) by profession, his name was John, from the city of Scythopolis (*Baishān*). I took care – although unfit to desire to have a share according to my strength in this work of common benefit – of the translation of these scholia from the Greek language to the Syriac, together with whatever I found being not translated accurately in the earlier translation of Sergius, placing my trust in God, who says: *the one who searches finds, the one who asks will receive, and to the one who will knock will be opened* (Lk 11:10).<sup>40</sup>

From this note we may learn that until Phocas' time the only translation of the Dionysian corpus used was that of Sergius, held in very high esteem, so much so that his controversial role in the expulsion of Severus from Constantinople, as well as the accusations of greed and sexual depravity were also forgotten. He was primarily known from his translation of the 'holy book' of Dionysius, which must have earned for him posthumously the priestly rank. It is well imaginable that, if he was indeed identical with the addressee of Severus' letters to 'Sergius comes and chief physician', it was *qomīs* that degenerated into *qashishā*.<sup>41</sup> The same change in the way Sergius was remembered, might have inspired the transmitted titles of several ones of his treatises, where he is called 'Mar Sergius, presbyter and chief physician' or simply 'Mar Sergius, presbyter of the city of Reshaina',<sup>42</sup> thus the change from the womanizing Roman clerk and physician in Severus' circle into a pious priest becoming complete. From these sources the view that Sergius was a priest also got into the modern literature. Yet, to our view, had Sergius been a priest, Pseudo-Zachariah would not have missed to mention this, to make his accusations of debauchery more serious.

Precious is also Phocas' description of his perplexity when faced to the difficult ideas of Dionysius as transmitted in Sergius' translation, and his joy at having found the Greek original provided with the scholia of John of Scythopolis, whom he calls 'an orthodox man, worthy of good memory'. Apparently, by that time, the only Greek text circulating was the one commented upon by John, and both John's activity as a Chalcedonian theologian and his bitter polemics against Severus were forgotten.<sup>43</sup> Remarkable is also the fact that Phocas calls John a 'lawyer' (σχολαστικός) and does not know about his episcopacy. This would indicate that this is what he read in his copy of the scholia and, so, these would date from John's activity before he became bishop of Scythopolis.<sup>44</sup> Remarkable is also Phocas' observation that Sergius' text contained 'inaccuracies'. As we will see, there were serious differences between Sergius' original Greek and the text edited by John and translated by Phocas.

## THE MIAPHYSITE APOLOGY FOR THE FAITH AT THE CONSTANTINOPOLITAN COLLOQUIUM AND ITS DIONYSIAN CITATIONS

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To see how the Dionysian vocabulary influenced the theology of the nascent and incrementally independent Miaphysite Church, it is worth citing and commenting on the

‘Dionysian’ part of the *Apology for the Faith* of the Miaphysite delegation at the colloquium of 532, which they presented to Justinian:

That Christ had become composed and that God the Word is in composition with the flesh ensouled by a rational and intellectual soul, this, the all-wise teachers of the Church have clearly said.<sup>45</sup> Dionysius from the Areios Pagos who, from the darkness and errancy of paganism, was guided by our guide Paul to arrive at the primordial light of the knowledge of God,<sup>46</sup> said in the treatise that he wrote *On the Divine Names of the Holy Trinity* that, when we are celebrating It as ‘Lover-of-mankind’, we say that:

«It is ‘Lover-of-mankind’ in the proper sense, because in truth, in one of Its hypostases, It entirely participated in those that belong to us, in order to attract to Itself and elevate the lowliness of our humanity, from which the simple Jesus ineffably became composed and took a temporary condition, the One who is from eternity and above all times, and ‘came to be in the likeness’ of our nature<sup>47</sup>—without change and without confusion—the One who is greater and higher than all the ranks and natures.»<sup>48</sup>

## Notes on the Text

1. The *Apology* is transmitted only in Syriac. Yet, it was originally written in Greek, from which it was translated at an unknown time in the sixth century. The Syriac translator—either Pseudo-Zachariah, or his source—aimed at a very precise, word-for-word translation, which permits the reconstruction of the original Greek. For this, however, we have to refer to the Dionysian Corpus, from where all the images and expressions of the above-cited text are being taken.
2. ‘That Christ had become composed (ܕܝܚܕܝܢܐ) and that God the Word is in composition with the flesh (ܕܝܚܕܝܢܐ ܕܠܥܡܪܐ) ensouled by a rational and intellectual soul ...’—this can be retranslated into Greek so: ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς συνετέθη καὶ σύνθετος ὁ θεὸς λόγος σαρκί/πρὸς σάρκα ἐμψυχωμένη/ν λογικῇ καὶ νοερᾷ ψυχῇ ...

This corresponds to Severus’ interpretation of the composite ‘new god-manly activity of Jesus’ in his Third Letter to John the Abbot:

Therefore, from the fact that we understand the ‘god-manly activity’ to be composite and one, there follow, that similar is and is predicated as such also the nature and hypostasis that has produced this [activity], so that He [Jesus] may not carry any difference in His activity from His nature.<sup>49</sup>

Definitively, the original source of the idea of ‘one composite nature of God the Word’ is not Dionysius but Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444, patriarch of Alexandria from 412), who opposed the idea of composition for describing the union of the two natures to that of mingling and confusion in his Second Letter to Succensus,<sup>50</sup> to which Severus

refers in his Second Letter to Sergius the Grammarian.<sup>51</sup> However, while in this letter Cyril speaks about ‘those things that come together according to composition’,<sup>52</sup> the verb συνετέθη (ܣܢܝܬܐܝܬ) is Dionysian. The sentence shows that the same hermeneutical tool was used here for making the Dionysian Corpus serve the Miaphysite cause as the one applied to the interpretation of the Dionysian Epistle 4 in Severus’ letter to John. This systematic treatment of the Dionysian texts, which are interpreted in a common and consistent framework of the Severan theology, shows that, either in the case of Severus’ Dionysian citations, or in that of the *Apology for the Faith* of the Miaphysite delegation, we are not dealing with occasional references to the Dionysian Corpus, but with a thorough engagement with this newly found ‘Church Father’ whose philosophical theology was to shape the theology of the nascent Miaphysite Church.

3. ‘Dionysius from the Areios Pagos who, from the darkness and errancy of paganism, was guided by our guide Paul to arrive at the primordial light of the knowledge of God, said ...’ Tentative retranslation: Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης, ὁ ἐκ σκοτὸς καὶ πλάνης Ἑλληνικῆς ὑπὸ τοῦ καθηγεμόνος ἡμῶν Παύλου χειραγωγούμενος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ ἀρχικώτατον φῶς τῆς θεογνωσίας φθάσας, ἐν τῇ πραγματείᾳ Περί θείων ὄνωμάτων τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος εἶπεν ...

Here again, the vocabulary is Dionysian. According to Dionysius’s doctrine, in order to pass over from the darkness of ignorance to the ‘knowledge of God’ (θεογνωσία, ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܗܝܬܐ) one needs guidance (χειραγωγία). Also, it is ‘the most divine Paul’ who distributes the solid food of the final knowledge to those perfect, while he gives the liquid food of the symbolic and ritual expressions to the imperfect, so that this food may guide them (χειραγωγούσης) to the ‘simple and unshakable knowledge of God (θεογνωσίαν)’ (Ep. IX. 4, Heil–Ritter 201, 7–15). And it was Saint Paul, who was the guide of both Dionysius and his teacher Hierotheus to the divine radiance of light (ἐπὶ τὴν θείαν φωτοδοσίαν χειραγωγός) (DN II. 11, Suchla 136, 18–19). Finally, it is the god-father who guides the catechumen, through his teaching of the Church doctrine, to the illumination of baptism (EH II. 4, Heil–Ritter 76, 1–7).

These parallels show that the author/s of the *Apology* is/are exploiting a theme that is present repetitively in the Dionysian Corpus. However, the clause analyzed contains a direct reference to a particular passage in the *Ecclesiastic Hierarchy*, yet not in the form it is transmitted in the Greek manuscript tradition, but in that in which it was found and translated by the first Syriac translator, Sergius of Reshaina. One of the metonyms that Dionysius uses for baptism is ‘divine birth’ (θεογενεσία). Now, whenever Sergius encountered this word in his original, he translated it faithfully as ‘divine rebirth’ (ܕܝܝܢܝܬܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܗܝܬܐ). However, at several instances, when we find ‘divine birth’ (θεογενεσία) in the Greek manuscripts, in Sergius’s translation one reads ‘divine knowledge’ (ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܗܝܬܐ), which must translate the Greek word θεογνωσία. Thus, ‘divine knowledge’ is another metonym for baptism in the version of the *Ecclesiastic Hierarchy*, which is transmitted to us uniquely through Sergius’ translation, but was thoroughly wiped out from a later edition from which all our Greek manuscripts derive.

This θεογενεσία/θεογνωσία variation can be observed also in the case of the passage, to which the *Apology for the Faith* refers here:

EHG III, Heil–Ritter 79, 23–80, 4	EHS VI, <sup>53</sup> Sin. Syriac. 52, fol. 89 vb
<p>In this way, also <i>the holy initiation/fulfilment of the <b>divine birth</b></i> [ ... ] Because this transmits the first light and is the beginning of all conferrals of light, it is from the [act] performed that we are celebrating the true name of enlightenment.</p> <p>In fact, although it is common to all the hierarchical [acts] to transmit from holy light to those initiated/fulfilled—yet, it was this one which gave me the first looking up, and it is through its <b>most primordial light</b> that I am being enlightened to the vision of the other holy things.<sup>54</sup></p>	<p>It is also in this way that <i>the divine tradition has called the baptism enlightenment. In fact, because this is the first service of the holy return toward the <b>divine knowledge</b></i> and this gives to the one who is being perfected this first light and becomes for him the beginning of all further divine illumination, it was from this fulfilment that the true name of enlightenment <i>was given to it.</i></p> <p>In fact, although this is common to all the services of the high-priesthood—namely to transmit from the divine light to those who are being fulfilled—yet, it was this one which first gave me to look up <i>from the first blindness</i><sup>55</sup> and <i>it was by means of the <b>primordial light</b> coming from it that I have been enlightened</i><sup>56</sup> to reach to the vision of these other holy services.</p>
<p><i>Apology for the Faith</i>: ‘Dionysius from the Areios Pagos who, from the darkness and errancy of paganism, was guided by our guide Paul to arrive at the <b>primordial light of the knowledge of God</b>. . . said.’<sup>57</sup></p>	

## Conclusions Drawn on the Three Texts

From a comparison of the three texts, we can draw the following conclusions:

Firstly, the Greek text of EHG, as it is transmitted by all the manuscripts, is almost incomprehensible. We have indicated a lacuna between the first expression: ‘holy initiation/fulfilment of the divine birth’ (in accusative), which has no predicate of which it could be the object, and its continuation, because the comparison with Sergius’s Syriac text clearly indicates that, at a later stage, many elements were omitted from the original text. Yet, one could also interpret the differences as the result of an awkward editorial intervention. Later translators tried to solve this problem in diverse ways, to give a meaning to this grammatically very difficult structure. The first among those who had

to deal with this task was Phocas bar Sargis of Edessa who, noting the insufficiency of Sergius' translation as compared to the Greek text he had, namely the one emanating from the editorial work of John of Scythopolis and containing the latter's Prologue and scholia, translated the scholia and corrected Sergius' translation, as we have seen above. Definitively, he had before his eye the same Greek text as the one we have now, and gave for it a word-for-word translation:

Thus, therefore, also the holy fulfilment of the making-of-gods<sup>58</sup> [objective case], because it gives the first light and is the beginning of all conferrals of divine lights, we are glorifying the true name of enlightenment [objective case] from what is fulfilled [in the act of baptism].<sup>59</sup>

Later translators were finding diverse solutions for the same problem.<sup>60</sup> Yet, the meaning of the passage becomes clear only from Sergius' Syriac. Also, as at least in two other loci, in EHG 'divine birth' (θεογενεσία) stands for what must have been 'divine knowledge', or 'knowledge of God' (θεογνωσία) in EHS.<sup>61</sup> The full explanation, according to which baptism is called enlightenment (φωτισμός, ܠܗܘܬܐܬܐܪܬܐ), because it marks the return from the darkness of ignorance to divine knowledge, can only be found in EHS.

When I started to work on Sergius' translation of the Dionysian Corpus, I noticed that his work witnesses an earlier and, in many respects, different version of the text. For this reason, usually, when I was analyzing a Dionysian text, I was also referring to its version as witnessed by Sergius' translation and claimed this 'two-redaction theory' in a number of publications.<sup>62</sup> This thesis was received with some doubt, but the only scholar who entered a serious philological debate with me was Emiliano Fiori, who tried to refute this thesis and argued that Sergius' text was fundamentally the same as the one that we have in the critical edition of Beate R. Suchla, Günter Heil, and Adolf Martin Ritter:

An overall study of Sergius' translation shows an extraordinary closeness to the Greek text as we know it in the modern critical edition of Suchla, Ritter and Heil. Conversely this demonstrates, on the one hand, that even before the earliest (ninth-century) extant Greek manuscripts, the tradition of our corpus was remarkably stable, with the exception of some variants at the very beginning of its transmission, giving us a good modern critical text; and, on the other hand, that Sergius rarely betrays the original message of Dionysius, even down to the original letter.<sup>63</sup>

I have never replied to Fiori otherwise than in friendly conversations, but I believe that the present study will contain sufficient proof material showing the existence, the relationship between, and the chronology of the reception of, the two redactions. Suffice it to say here that, while Fiori's argument may look reasonable in the case of the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*—though strong counterarguments can be made—they lose their interpretative value if we try to apply them to the *Ecclesiastic Hierarchy* and this, precisely on the ground of the observed high fidelity of Sergius as translator to his model, established not only by Fiori, but also by Adam McCollum, who studied Sergius' translation technique in his translation of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo* as well as all those who studied his medical and philosophical translations.<sup>64</sup> We should

admit with Fiori and McCollum that Sergius was a translator who tried to remain faithful to his original at the lexical as well as the micro- and macrosyntactical levels, while practising a relatively free, interpretative translation method. He tried to make the translated text flow naturally in Syriac, using doublets and periphrastic expressions giving a sense to sense equivalence. Precisely for this reason, it would be very difficult to explain why he would have practically rewritten an entire treatise, inserting regularly entire clauses missing from the original and going as far as changing the entire structure of the treatise. Nor would it be easy to explain why he would have gone back to the main philosophical source of Dionysius, namely Proclus, to insert Proclian expressions partly or entirely absent from the Greek original, as is the case not only in the *Ecclesiastic Hierarchy* but also in the other treatises.

The second conclusion we can draw is that the *Apology for the Faith* is apparently referring to the baptismal passage cited above, while also having the equally Dionysian idea of Paul being the leader (χειραγωγός) of Dionysius, Hierotheus, and of all the Christians (see DN II. 11, Suchla 136, 18–19 and Ep. IX. 4, Heil–Ritter 201, 7–15 cited above), leading them from the darkness of ignorance to the light of the ‘knowledge of God’ (θεογνωσία), equated both in EHS and the *Apology* with baptism. This becomes clear from the terms θεογνωσία—lying behind the Syriac ܬܝܠܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ — and ἀρχικώτατον φῶς—lying behind the Syriac ܠܘܬܐ ܕܠܘܬܐ in the *Apology for the Faith*. While Sergius translated ‘most primordial light’ by the Syriac expression ܠܘܬܐ ܕܠܘܬܐ, later Phocas used the same Syriac expression as the *Apology*: ܠܘܬܐ ܕܠܘܬܐ.

It is significant that the source of this reference to EH is not the variant known from the Greek manuscripts (EHG), but the one known from Sergius’ translation (EHS). Thus, it seems that the Miaphysite circle around Severus, who, in the early decades of the sixth century, ‘discovered’ the Dionysian Corpus, had access to it in the form in which Sergius knew and translated it. Noting this has great significance for understanding the stages of the text tradition of the Dionysian Corpus. When I first discovered that there were two redactions of the corpus, a first one represented by Sergius’ translation (CDS), and a second one represented by all the extant Greek manuscripts and all the other translations (CDG), I hypothesized that the first version was circulated only for an esoteric circle and that, as soon as the literary fiction of the *CD*—which I am reluctant to call a forgery—was launched, it was re-edited for hiding its original ‘Origenist’ content.<sup>65</sup>

Seen in the new light of the above findings, this set of hypotheses proves untenable. As this essay demonstrates, the two-redactions thesis stands to reason. Yet, apparently, when the corpus first appeared in the public sphere in the circles of Severus, it had that form in which we see it in Sergius’ translation. Nothing could be more natural than this, as Sergius was a member of Severus’ intellectual circle, as demonstrate above. But then, my earlier speculations about the secrecy of the texts read in ‘clandestine’ Origenist circles’ do not stand to reason. As to the question where and when the second edition was created, all the indications point towards what Beata Regina Suchla had called the ‘circle of John of Scythopolis’,<sup>66</sup> but perhaps we should say, to John of Scythopolis himself. Certainly, this second edition testifies to an attempted ‘de-Organization’ of the corpus. But this happened later, in the 530s–40s, when, in the heat of the ‘Second



Origenist Controversy,' John of Scythopolis was writing his Prologue and glosses on the Dionysian Corpus, aimed at inserting this contested authority within the framework of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. In the early decades of the sixth century, when the Dionysian Corpus became public, Origenism was not yet an issue. Nor was this so-called Origenism as clandestine a movement—at least not in all its aspects—as Cyril of Scythopolis, who has shaped our view on the movement, presents it. Yet, for a long while, I thought so, before yielding to the evidence and admitting that the movement labelled with the pejorative term 'Origenism' was one of the mainstream trends of early Christianity, which incidentally but repetitively fell under official condemnation in the imperial Church.<sup>67</sup>

A further conclusion is that we should reject the one drawn by Emiliano Fiori from the analysis of the Dionysian citation of DN I. 4 in the *Apology* in comparison to Sergius' translation.<sup>68</sup> His conclusion is that both the *Apology* and Sergius had before their eyes the Greek text as we know it, but Sergius' translation follows more closely the structure and the dynamics of the text.<sup>69</sup> Fiori hypothesizes that, at the time of the Colloquium, Sergius' translation did not exist yet and that it was commissioned by one of the participants, Peter, the bishop of Reshaina, with whom Sergius maintained a good relationship according to the notice of Pseudo-Zachariah.<sup>70</sup> He founds his dating partly on the fact that neither Pseudo-Zachariah, nor Peter of Callinicum, who translated Severus' anti-Julianist works containing the citations from DN II. 9,<sup>71</sup> used Sergius' translation, and partly on the hypothesis of Franz Mali, according to which both the chapter titles of the *CD* and the Apostolic setting with the works addressed to Timothy, bishop of Ephesus, were added to a pre-existent text after the Colloquium, when the usefulness of the corpus for supporting Miaphysite theology was recognized. The fact that Sergius' translation reproduces both the Apostolic setting and the chapter titles is an indication for Fiori that the translation was made after 532. He recognizes that these indications do not prove his dating but proposes them for further discussion.<sup>72</sup>

Now, to enter this learned discussion, I do not find Fiori's hypotheses convincing. On the one hand, the *Apology* was written, and the entire Colloquium was held in Greek. The Syriac translation of the *Apology*, transmitted by Pseudo-Zachariah, must have been made later, based on the Greek text. It is true that, if the Syriac translation of the *Apology* was part of John bar Aphthonia's report on the events, which Pseudo-Zachariah claims to have used, the Syriac text can be quasi-contemporary to the lost Greek, but we cannot say anything sure about this. Whoever the Syriac translator was, most probably he did not look up all the existing Syriac translations of the patristic authorities cited. On the other hand, nothing indicates that either the Apostolic setting, or the chapter titles were added later to a pre-existing Dionysian Corpus. Quite on the contrary, the whole corpus is founded on a thorough utilization of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, and the chapter titles are invented through reworking those of the *Platonic Theology*, as I have shown in two previous publications.<sup>73</sup> They are part and parcel of the original texture of the corpus.

Nor is it correct to say that the *Apology* and Sergius translate precisely the same text that we have in the Greek manuscripts emanating from the edition of John of Scythopolis, and which can be found in B. R. Suchla's edition. Moreover, in this case, even the originals of the texts witnessed by the translator of the *Apology* and by Sergius must have been considerably different. However, in order to proceed to a meaningful



comparison, we should include two supplementary texts. In fact, concerning this citation, which had such a great importance for the development of the debates between Severus' party and his Dyophysite and Miaphysite opponents, we have two more Syriac translations to consider.

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE DIONYSIAN TEXT TRADITION IN THE SIXTH CENTURY, ILLUSTRATED ON ONE EXAMPLE

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One of the two translations to consider is, obviously, the late seventh-century translation of Phocas bar Sargis, but we also have an earlier witness to the text in the *Theological Discourse* of Theodosius, patriarch of Alexandria, another friend and brother-in-arms of Severus. The *Discourse* was composed in 556/57, at the beginning of the tritheist controversy in the Miaphysite community.<sup>74</sup> Then, once again the same Dionysian passage from DN I. 4, to which another citation from DN II. 6 was added, was used to refute radical opponents to the tritheists, whom Theodosius thought to go to the other extreme and who claimed that in the Incarnation the entire divine nature became united to the entire human nature.<sup>75</sup> According to Rorem and Lamoreaux, these opponents were from the Chalcedonian confession, but it is more logical to suppose that they were an internal party within the Miaphysites, because they used the same authoritative texts, and because Theodosius argued against them calling in Severus' authority.<sup>76</sup> Had they been from outside the Severian community, Theodosius would have used other, common patristic authorities. These opponents John of Ephesus calls 'Sabellians'.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, as we will see shortly, it was precisely the Dionysian text of DN I. 4, as it was interpreted in the heat of the anti-Chalcedonian debate, which prepared the ground for the views of these opponents, who were invoking Dionysius' authority in favour of their views. The discourse was written in Greek and because of its importance for the Miaphysite community, it was translated into Syriac several times. I am citing here the earliest translation, contained in the manuscript BL Add. 14.602, because this manuscript, according to Wright's catalogue, is from the late sixth or early seventh century and so the translation contained therein antedates Phocas' translation. Yet, the three translations are testifying to one and the same underlying Greek text:

If some people are to avoid saying overtly that the Father and the Holy Spirit, that is, the Holy Trinity, became flesh, they would dare to recur cleverly and cunningly to this: they use in an unholy and impure manner the words that were used by the saint Dionysius the Areopagite in the treatise addressed to Timothy *On the Divine Names*, when he writes on the divinity that is seen in the Holy Trinity that 'It is called properly lover-of-mankind as It entirely and truly participated in one of Its hypostases in what belongs to us.'

And Theodosius to reply to them:

Let them be put to shame first by Severus of holy memory who, in his writings, not less than them, and without any neglect, perused the holy Dionysius. For it is obvious that he used the same words (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ) wherever he had to, but he was not convinced to accept the depravity of those who say that the universal substances, I mean of the divinity and of the humanity, became united and composed.<sup>78</sup>

This is a precious testimony to the fact that the Dionysian citation of DN I. 4 used by the *Apology for the Faith* and its interpretation came from Severus himself, even if we do not find among his extant writings an explicit reference.<sup>79</sup> Then, a little later, Theodosius repeats the entire citation, with the same *incipit* and *desinit* as it was used in the *Apology*. Thus, the existence of four early Syriac translations of the same Dionysian text gives us a unique opportunity to observe, in a nutshell, the evolution of the Dionysian text and its interpretations in the Greco-Syriac text tradition. I am attempting a word-for-word translation of the texts as far as this is possible, to bring out their intrinsic differences that are due to the evolution of translation techniques, to doctrinal concepts, but also to changes in the underlying Greek text.

Christological passage of DN I. 4	
A) Greek text as found in the later Greek manuscripts	B) Sergius's translation (sometime between 518 and 536)
<p>[We see that the Principle-of-divinity is holily celebrated ...] as 'Lover-of-mankind' <i>par excellence</i> because in truth and entirely, in one of its hypostases it participated in our condition (τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς), calling back to itself [to the Principle-of-divinity] and elevating [variant reading: 'restoring']<sup>80</sup> the human fallenness/abasement (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἐσχατιάν), from which [the expression is ambiguous: from the fallenness? from the hypostasis?] the simple Jesus became composed and the Eternal received a temporal extension (παράτασιν χρονικὴν), and inside our nature came to be [variant reading: 'and there came as far as our nature']<sup>81</sup> the One who is <i>supersubstantially</i> transcendent (ἐκβεβηκώς) to all the rank in all the nature, with the unchangeable and unconfusable steadfastness/foundation<sup>82</sup> of His properties.<sup>83</sup></p>	<p>The divinity is also called 'Lover-of-mankind' in reality and <i>par excellence</i>, because in truth It participated entirely, in one of Its hypostases, in all that belong to us, as It [feminine: the divinity] calls to Itself and raises and elevates the abasement of our humanity. Therefore, from this [abasement/humanity] ineffably became composed the simple Jesus and the One who was Being took temporal extension, and came to be inside our nature the One who is above all ranks that are in all the natures, while He also possesses without change and without confusion the steadfastness of those that belong to His substance [that is, of His properties: <i>d-hālēn d-īṭūṭē{h}</i>].<sup>84</sup></p>

<p>C) <i>Apology for the Faith</i> (532)</p>	<p>[Dionysius from the Areios Pagos . . . said in the treatise that he wrote <i>On the Divine Names of the Holy Trinity</i> that, when we are celebrating It as ‘Lover-of-mankind’, we say that] It is ‘Lover-of-mankind’ in the proper sense, because in truth, in one of Its hypostases, It [the Holy Trinity] entirely participated in those that belong to us, in order to attract to Itself and elevate the lowliness of our humanity, from which the simple Jesus ineffably became composed and took a temporary <i>condition</i>, the One who is from eternity <i>and above all times</i>, and came to be <i>in the likeness</i> of our nature – without change and without confusion –, the One <i>who is greater and higher than all the ranks and natures</i>.<sup>85</sup></p>
<p>[The blessed ordained priest of Christ’s mysteries has said that] It [the divinity] is called properly ‘Lover-of-mankind’, as It truly and entirely participated in one of Its hypostases in what belong to us, as It calls back to Itself and raises the baseness of humanity, from which ineffably the simple Jesus became composed, and took a temporal extension the Eternal, and inside of our nature came to be the One who had gone <i>supersubstantially</i> outside all rank of all the natures, with the unchangeability and unconfusability of His foundations.<sup>86</sup></p>	<p>[We see that the principle-of-divinity<sup>87</sup> is called . . . ] ‘Lover-of-mankind’ <i>par excellence</i>, because It has participated in truth in what belong to us, entirely in one of Its hypostases, as It [feminine: the principle-of-divinity] turns back to Itself and elevates our human baseness, from which ineffably became composite Jesus the simple One, and took a temporal extension the Eternal, and came to be inside our nature the One who is <i>supersubstantially</i> outside all the rank that is in all the nature, with the unchangeable and unconfusable steadfastness that is in the properties [<i>dab-hālēn baytāyāīā</i>].<sup>88</sup></p>
<p>D) Theodosius of Alexandria, Theological Discourse (556/57), translation in BL Add 14.602 (sixth/seventh century)</p>	<p>E) Phocas’s translation (684/86)</p>

## Analysis

The analysis of the above comparative table shows how editors and translators were grappling with a very difficult text, which hardly yielded to their purposes.

### *The Greek text as it stands in the critical edition*

1. The subject of a long exposition in this subchapter of the Divine Names is what Dionysius calls θεαρχία (*thearchia*), which can be translated as Principle-of-divinity, or Principle-of-divinization. It is almost univocally accepted in modern scholarship that, in the *CD*, this refers to divinity as such and means the standard concept of the Holy Trinity. Yet, an analysis of the usage of *thearchia* and the scriptural quotations referring to it show that normally *thearchia* means Christ. A particularly significant example is DN II.1, Suchla 122, 1–5:

It is celebrated by the Scriptures that the entire existence of The Principle-of-divinity (*thearchia*), what it really is, is determined and manifested by the Goodness-in-itself. What else can we learn from the holy theology, when it says in the form of explanation that the Principle-of-divinity Itself says teaching us: ‘Why do you ask me about the good? Nobody else is good, but only God’ etc.

On the one hand, this locus indicates that Dionysius follows here Origen (see *First Principles*, I, 2.13), calling the Father Goodness-in-itself (in Rufinus’s translation: *principalis bonitas*), and the Son a participant in the Father’s goodness. On the other hand, it also permits us to understand that *thearchia* is a metonym for Christ. What Origen expressed as: ‘The Saviour Himself rightly says in the Gospel, “No one is good but one, the God and Father”’ (translation John Behr) becomes in Dionysius: ‘the Principle-of-divinity Itself says in the form of explanation: “Why do you ask me about the good? Nobody else is good, but only God”’. This, together with other similar passages, establishes the equivalence ‘Principle-of-divinity’ = ‘Saviour’.<sup>89</sup> Christ is Principle-of-divinity, because he confers the divinity on those divinized.

2. If the *thearchia* means Christ, then, also ‘one of its hypostases’ does not indicate a doctrine of the Incarnation of ‘one of the Trinity’, but an Antiochian doctrine of two, perhaps even three, hypostases in Christ, interpreted in a Platonist framework<sup>90</sup> However, rather than pure Nestorianism, this is an Antiochian, strictly non-Cyrrillian, interpretation of Chalcedon, which employs ambiguous terms, so that a Cyrrillian interpretation becomes possible if *thearchia* is understood as the Trinity. Apparently, this has deceived the circle of Severus, which, however, underwent great difficulties in adapting this doctrine to their radical one-subject Christology of the ‘one incarnate nature of God the Word’. The successive attempts at translating and interpreting this fundamentally Antiochian Christological passage testify to these difficulties.

3. ‘Calling back to Itself and elevating the human fallenness (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἐσχατιάν), from which the simple Jesus became composed and the Eternal received a temporal extension ...’ Here Dionysius uses a characteristic Proclian terminology for explaining the Incarnation. According to Proclus, the eternal beings are simple

and non-extended, while those in becoming have their being in temporal expansion (χρονική παράτασις). The mediator between the simplicity and eternity of the intellect and the temporal extension of the corporeal world is the soul. See Proclus' *Elements of Theology* 50 and 55. I think that it is the soul that is meant here as 'one of the hypostases' of the Principle-of-divinity (*thearchy*). So, it is 'from this', that is, the soul, that the pre-existent intellect of Christ, which is eternal, and which Dionysius calls 'Jesus',<sup>91</sup> becomes composite and obtains a temporal extension. In fact, it is not from the baseness or fallenness (ἐσχάτια: this is the meaning of this word in the Dionysian terminology) that the eternal enters time and that the simple becomes composed but through the intermediary of the soul. The attempts of the early Syriac translators to translate 'human fallenness/baseness' as the 'baseness/lowliness of our humanity' and to refer 'from which' to the 'humanity', instead of the 'baseness', testify to their perplexity in front of this expression.

4. 'And inside our nature came to be' / 'and He came as far as our nature'. The first variant, also chosen by Suchla, seems to be the original, all the more so because this is the only variant that the Syriac translators seem to know. Yet, this expression suggests a rather net Dyophysite doctrine. Perhaps the 'He came as far as our nature' variant was invented to mitigate this strong Dyophysite meaning.

5. 'The One who is *supersubstantially* transcendent'. The expression '*supersubstantially*' is conspicuously absent from both Sergius' version and that of the *Apology*. It appears first in the version of Theodosius and is also there in Phocas. It seems to me that it was absent from the version preceding the edition of John of Scythopolis, known to both Sergius and to the translator of the *Apology*, and that it was added to help the 'orthodox' view represented either by the Miaphysite (Severus of Antioch), or the neo-Chalcedonian (John of Scythopolis) interpretation of the passage. The attribute '*supersubstantially*' would identify the simple Jesus, who is represented here as an eternal but not absolutely transcendent being, with the transcendent Logos. It is thus a misleading later addition to the text. This omission/addition is another indicator that, before the editorial work of John of Scythopolis, there was a different Greek text in circulation, of which Sergius is the witness. Not only the seventh-century Phocas, but also the mid-sixth-century Theodosius were already using the new edition of John of Scythopolis which, thus, even in the Miaphysite circles, replaced the older one.

6. 'With the unchangeable and unconfusable steadfastness/foundation of His properties.' Dionysius applies here the standard Antiochian attributes of the union: in the union the natures did not change their properties, nor did they become confused. As the Definition of Chalcedon had adopted these attributes, he could safely do this in a Chalcedonian context. However, the other two attributes of Chalcedon: 'indivisibly and inseparably', which were meant to satisfy the Cyrillian claims of the hypostatic union, are conspicuously missing.

### *Sergius' text*

In Sergius' translation we can observe his usual translation method. He tries to give a precise equivalent to every element of the sentence he translates, while trying to make it comprehensible for his audience. Usual is also that he uses doublets—even triplets—to

render the meaning of a difficult expression clear for his audience. Here, he renders *θεαρχία* with the simple word *alāhūiā* meaning ‘divinity’. Thus, for Sergius, the subject of the first part of the sentence is unproblematically the divinity. ‘Raises and elevates’ is a doublet for the Greek variant *ἄνω τιθεῖσα*, rather than for *ἀνατιθεῖσα*, displayed by one group of the Greek manuscripts and meaning ‘restoring’. ‘The abasement of our humanity’ is a perfectly legitimate translation for *τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἐσχάτιαν*, but it has the effect that the Syriac reader would think that ‘from this’ means ‘from our humanity’, so that the clause expresses the Severian doctrine of ‘one composite nature of the Word’. ‘The One who was Being’—while one could suppose that this indicates a variant reading for ‘the Eternal’, the parallel version of the *Apology* shows that this solution is an example of Sergius’ sense-to-sense translation method. ‘And came to be *inside our nature* the One who is above all ranks that are in all the natures’: Sergius testifies to the fact that the more Dyophysite sounding version is the original reading and not the ‘he came *as far as our nature*’ variant, which may be a Miaphysite correction. Note the periphrastic expression: ‘the steadfastness of those that belong to His substance’: *d-hālēn d-īlūlē{h}*, for ‘properties’ (τὰ οἰκεῖα). Sergius was a pioneer who experimented with the Syriac translation of Greek philosophical technical terms, which were not yet set in his times.

### *The citation in the Apology for the Faith*

Compared to the other translations, first of all, to that of the quasi-contemporary Sergius, it stands out that the text that the Miaphysite bishops proposed in Constantinople as a Dionysian proof-text for Severian theology was not an original citation but a re-edition for doctrinal purposes. As the translator of the *Apology* did a very close translation, although occasionally he would also use doublets, his re-edition work can be closely followed over against the more faithful version of Sergius. Apparently, the author of the *Apology* (Severus himself? John bar Aphtonias?) was well aware of the Dyophysite elements in the Dionysian text, and tried to eliminate them. Instead of the ‘Principle-of-divinity’ he made ‘the Holy Trinity’ the subject of the first part of the sentence, so as to make the expression ‘in one of Its hypostases’ fully orthodox. By this, he laid the foundations for the internal ‘heresy of the Sabellians’ within the Miaphysite fold, as we will see. Just like Sergius, by subtly translating ‘human fallenness’ as ‘the lowliness of our humanity’, he made ‘our humanity’ the principle from which the ‘simple Jesus became composed’.

Apparently, this editor also eliminated the oddly sounding Proclian ‘temporary extension’ (παράτασιν χρονικήν) and replaced it with the similarly sounding but much safer ‘temporal condition’ (κατάστασιν χρονικήν). In fact, the Syriac word that is used in the translation: *qūyāmā* is the standard translation for *κατάστασις*. The expression ‘The One who is from eternity and above all times’ is most probably a periphrastic translation of ‘the Eternal’ (ὁ αἰδιος). He ‘came to be in the likeness of our nature’ obviously serves to eliminate the expression ‘he came to be inside our nature’, bearing strong Dyophysite connotations. Here the editor of the polemical Dionysian citation replaced the Dionysian expression with a Dyophysite overtone by a quote from Saint Paul: ‘he was made in the likeness of men’ (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος; Phil. 2:7). The

editor also eliminated the expression indicating the reference to the steadfast separation of the properties of the substances; instead, he made the expressions ‘without change and without confusion’ qualify the condescension of ‘one of the hypostases of the Holy Trinity’.

In this manner, the editor performed a complete sanitization of this dubious text and created a new patristic authority, which he meant to be in perfect conformity with the Severian Christology. This, he could safely do as, apparently, the Chalcedonians at that time did not possess any copy of the Dionysian Corpus, nor had they heard about it earlier, and the emergence of this new patristic authority took them by surprise—an impression that their leader, Hypatius of Ephesus, expressed by denying the authenticity of the corpus.<sup>92</sup> It is all the more important that, similarly to Sergius’ version, the text of the *Apology* omits the adjective ‘supersubstantially’, apparently because it was not there in the Greek original, from which the edited version was made. Otherwise, it would have come in handy in the sanitization effort. This is the only omission that Sergius’ version shares with that of the *Apology* and, moreover, the only omission that is there in Sergius as compared to the extant Greek text. Thus, we can attribute the insertion of the adverb ‘supersubstantially’ to another sanitizing effort—that of John of Scythopolis.

### *The Theological Discourse of Theodosius and Phocas’ translation*

Theodosius’ text testifies to a radically changed situation, as it conforms to the edition of John of Scythopolis. In the twenty-four or twenty-five years since the Constantinopolitan Colloquium, the Dionysian Corpus had gained currency both among the Chalcedonians and the Miaphysites. John of Scythopolis had prepared his commented new edition, which had become the standard. To continue the debates about the correct interpretation of the Dionysian authority, both parties had to use the authoritative version, which John’s edition had become. After his deposition in 536 from the patriarchal throne of Alexandria, Theodosius lived in home confinement in Constantinople under the Empress Theodora’s protection and, after her death in 548, under Justinian’s protection. He was administering the nascent Miaphysite Church. Most probably, by that time, a standard Dionysian florilegium had been made, which served as a basis for the discussion of rival factions, including the tritheists and those called by John of Ephesus ‘Sabellians’, and certainly the Chalcedonians, otherwise a debate would have been immaterial. By that time, the sort of creative handling of the sources, which characterized the use of the Dionysian citation at the Colloquium of 532, had become impossible. Theodosius’ citations seem to witness the existence of such a florilegium that had become authoritative in the Miaphysite Church by the mid-sixth century.

Apparently, the claim of Theodosius’ opponents, according to whom in Christ the generic divine substance as such became united to the generic human substance was at least encouraged by the previous reading, in D.N. I.4, of thearchia as the Trinity, which ‘in one of Its hypostases’ has come in union with the human nature. From Theodosius’ argument against those who ‘use in an unholy and impure manner the words that were used by the saint Dionysius the Areopagite in his treatise *On the Divine Names*



addressed to Timothy', we understand that this passage and its earlier Miaphysite interpretation played a central role in the argument of the 'Sabellians'.

Theodosius' translation is the first Syriac witness to include the adverb 'supersubstantially', a most efficient insertion to remove, or at least to obscure, the original meaning of the passage, influenced by Plotinian, Proclian, and Evagrian terminology, and expressing a pronounced Dyophysite doctrine.

Finally, Phocas' translation structurally corresponds to the one of Theodosius' citation but follows more precisely the Greek text. It is remarkable that this is the first Syriac translation of Dionysius, which uses a terminological translation, *hālēn baylāyāṭā*, for translating 'properties' (τὰ οἰκεῖα). In the seventh-century Aristotelian translations, this is the standard translation used by the Qenneshre scholars, Athanasius of Balad, Jacob of Edessa, George of the Arabs, while sixth-century translators outside the Qenneshre school used different solutions<sup>93</sup> as could also be seen in the various solutions with which our texts B, C, and D were experimenting.

## CONCLUSIONS

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We might conclude from the above inquiry that Severus' three positive citations of the Dionysian Corpus, considered to be the first witnesses to the corpus, are not standing apart, nor are they coincidental. They are witnessing the fact that, in the early decades of the sixth century, the learned circle around Severus discovered the corpus as an important tool for defending the Miaphysite confession. This circle cherished especially the Dionysian Christological passages, which they found useful for establishing a moderate Miaphysite position, which went as far as possible—while keeping an Orthodox Cyrillian foundation constituted by the 'one incarnate nature of God the Word' formula—in recognizing the reality of Christ's humanity. Especially, the expression 'the simple Jesus became composite from the abasement of our humanity' (as they understood the passage) appealed to them, because they saw in it an anticipation of Cyril's conception about the two natures of Christ before the union but one composite nature after the union, 'one composite nature' being the equivalent of 'one incarnate nature'. Also, they saw in the 'new god-manly activity' of Epistle 4 a confirmation of the same theory as, according to Aristotelian logic, activity always belongs to a concrete being, that is, nature. When the Miaphysite delegation presented its patristic authorities to Emperor Justinian and his Chalcedonian theologians, the Areopagite had an important place in its argument, which used not only the Christological quote of DN I.4 but also Severus' interpretation of Epistle 4 and the baptismal passage of EH III, but in the form in which it was translated by Sergius of Reshaina, and not in that of the later redaction, which has been transmitted in the extant Greek manuscripts, all issuing from the editorial work of John of Scythopolis. Also, we have seen that John bar Aphtonia, a very close friend and brother-in-arms of Severus, who served as the secretary of the Miaphysite delegation at the colloquium of 532, is the most probable candidate to be

the addressee of Severus' letter treating the interpretation of Dionysius' Epistle 4. John bar Aphtonia was the founder of the monastery of Qenneshre, a centre of philosophical learning, where the same philosophical curriculum that Sergius of Reshaina established through his philosophical translations was practised. This curriculum taught logic through Aristotle's *Organon*, physics through the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*, and metaphysics through the Dionysian Corpus. All this supports John Watt's claim that Qenneshre was continuing a tradition of learning started by John. The similarities between the activities of Sergius and the later Qenneshre scholars should not surprise us, as Sergius obviously belonged to the same circle of learned men, which gathered around Severus.

Finally, this study was able to locate, in the *Apology for the Faith* of the Miaphysite bishops presented to Justinian in 532, testimonies independent from the translation of Sergius to the putative first redaction of the Dionysian Corpus, which was going to be replaced by the authoritative edition of John of Scythopolis. Thus, we were able to trace the evolution of the Syriac translations from that of Sergius, made sometime between 518 and 536, to that of Phocas bar Sargis made in 684/86.

## NOTES

1. For a recent survey of Sergius' life, see Samin Aydin (2016), *Sergius of Reshaina: Introduction to Aristotle and His Categories, Addressed to Philotheos*, 3–9.
2. DN II.9, Suchla 133, 5–9, cited in *Contra additiones Juliani*, ch. 41 and in *Adversus apologiam Juliani*, ch. 25. For a parallel edition and discussion of these two texts, together with the corresponding Syriac translation of Sergius of Reshaina, see Fiori (2014), *Dionigi Areopagita Nomi divini, Teologia mistica, Epistole: la versione siriana di Sergio di Rēšaynā (VI secolo)* (textus), 169–172. Later, I will return to this fragment.
3. Franz Diekamp (ed.) (1907), *Doctrina Patrum de Incarnatione Verbi*, 309–310. Severus cites Epistle 4, Heil–Ritter 161, 9–10.
4. See P.Rorem–J. C.Lamoreaux (1998), *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, 13.
5. See Lebon (1930), 'Le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et Sévère d'Antioche', 899, and Rorem–Lamoreaux (1998), 14.
6. Rorem–Lamoreaux (1998), 13–14.
7. The letter is referred to as *Epistula 3 ad Johannem ducem* ('to the strategos John': apparently a misunderstanding of the term ἡγούμενος) by A. Grillmeier and T. Hainthaler (1995), *Christ in Christian Tradition II/2*, 270; as *Third Epistle to John the Hegumen* by Rorem–Lamoreaux (1998), 13; as *Letter 3 of Severus* by S. Mariev (2014), 'Hypatios of Ephesos and Ps.-Dionysios Areopagites', 125 among others—to illustrate the lack of clarity concerning this issue.
8. See E. W. Brooks (ed. and trans.) (1919), 'The Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch from Numerous Syriac Manuscripts' in PO 12/2, 170.
9. These are Letters I.49, 50, 52, II.2, V. 11 and 12 in E. W. Brooks, (ed. and trans.) (1920), 'The Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch, from Numerous Syriac Manuscripts (fasc. II)' in *Patrologia Orientalis* 14/1.
10. E. Honigsmann (1952), *Pierre l'ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite.*, 5, note 5.

11. On John bar Aphthonia, see the detailed introduction of F. Nau, (ed and trans.) (1902), *Vie de Jean bar Aphthonia. Texte syriaque*, 1–16; see also the short entry of Jeff W. Childers, ‘John bar Aphthonia’, in S. Brock, A. M. Butts, G. A. Kiraz, and L. Van Rompay (eds) (2011), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/John-bar-Aphthonia>. On the monastery of Qenneshre, see Jack B. Tannous, ‘Qenneshre, Monastery of’, Brock et al. (2011), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Qenneshre-Monastery-of>, with bibliographical references. Although one of the early Lives of Severus was later attributed to John bar Aphthonia, he cannot be the author. On this, see Nau (1902), 8–12 and S. Brock and B. Fitzgerald (trans., intro., and notes) (2013), *Two Early Lives of Severos, Patriarch of Antioch*, 24–25.
12. On the Colloquium and the parallel Syriac and Latin sources that are reporting on it, see S. Brock (1981), ‘The conversations with the Syrian Orthodox under Justinian (532)’; on the names of the participants, see *ibid.* 117–18.
13. This Apology is called by several appellations in the sources. According to Innocentius of Maroneia, the Oriental bishops called their writing *chartula satisfactionis de fide nostra* (E. Schwartz (1914), *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* IV/2, 170, 25), which I would translate as a ‘document of communication on our faith’, as I suppose that it translates the Greek χάρτης πληροφορίας περὶ τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν but it could also translate χάρτης ἀπολογίας περὶ τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν. Pseudo-Zachariah uses various expressions: ‘petition in the form of a supplication concerning the faith’ (E. W. Brooks (ed.) (1953), *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, 89, 17–19, G. Greatrex, R. R. Phenix, and C. Horn (trans.) (2011), *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity*, 314) and ‘deposition concerning their faith’ (Brooks (1953), 115, 8–9, Greatrex et al. (2011), 345; but also ‘apology’; the proceedings in Harvard Syr 22 call it *plerophoria*: ‘communication’ (sc. about the faith of the Miaphysite bishops: Brock (1981), 92 and 93) and also ‘documents’ (*kartise*: perhaps from the Greek χάρται, plural of χάρτης: *ibid.*); the summary in BL Add 12.155 calls this text ‘apology concerning the true faith’ (F. Nau [1919], ‘Documents pour servir à l’histoire de l’église nestorienne’, 192, 2–3 and Brock (1981), 113).
14. Brooks (1953), 119, 20–120, 1; Greatrex et al. (2011), 315.
15. The other witness is the Chronicle of Michael Rabo (often, but erroneously, called Michael the Great), but his source is Pseudo-Zachariah.
16. *Libellus*: in Greek λιβελλος, is a short dogmatic statement, or an official document. It seems to me that the Syriac plural ܠܒܠܠܝܬܐ translates this term as, in the summary of BL Add 12.155, the orders of the emperor are called ܠܒܠܠܝܬܐ, but here, ܠܒܠܠܝܬܐ.
17. I translate here the expression ܐܕܬܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ as ‘for the no little time of over one year’. The bishops, having been called back from their exile, stayed in Constantinople for a long period. It seems that John bar Aphthonia noted down not only the proceedings of the three-day colloquium of the debate with the Chalcedonian bishops but wrote a sort of chronicle on the stay of the Miaphysite clerics in Constantinople, which served as a source for Pseudo-Zachariah’s chapter. On this, see note 220 of Greatrex et al. (2011) *ad locum*.
18. Brooks (1953), 122, 17–27. Translation IP. The translation in Greatrex et al. (2011), 353, is not substantially different from this, but there are some minor differences, and I brought the quote in conformity with the vocabulary applied here.
19. *Anonymous Life of Severus* 76, M. A. Kugener (1904), *Vie de Sévère par Jean de Beth Aphthonia*, 257 [173], 11–258 [174], 2, translation by Brian Fitzgerald, in Brock-Fitzgerald

- (2013), 135, slightly changed to bring the vocabulary in conformity with the one used in this study.
20. See Nau (1902), 5–8.
  21. E. W. Brooks (1904), *The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, in the Version of Athanasius of Nisibis*, Letter VIII.5, vol. I/2, 470 (Syriac); II/2, 415 (translation).
  22. See above, note 9.
  23. Brooks (1904), Letter V.12, vol. I/2 382 (Syriac); II/2, 339 (translation).
  24. Nau (1902), 8, 23 (Syriac); 35 (French translation).
  25. On Qenneshre and its philosophical curriculum, see J. W. Watt (2011), ‘From Sergius to Mattā: Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in the Syriac Tradition’ and Watt (2017), ‘The Curriculum of Aristotelian Philosophy among the Syrians.’ Here, he writes, among others (p. 175): ‘This monastic institution was celebrated in the Syriac-speaking region as a centre of Greek studies, and had originally been located near Antioch. It migrated there, at the time of the Chalcedonian persecution of Miaphysites around 530, under the leadership of John bar Aphthonia, whose father had taught rhetoric in Edessa. John himself appears to have written exclusively in Greek, and it is quite possible that its membership included some who were interested in philosophy from the earliest days of its relocation or before it.’
  26. Brooks (1953), 136, 1–138, 14, translated and commented in Greatrex et al. (2011), 368–71 and in Aydin (2016), 4–6.
  27. Phocas’ Prologue to and translation of Dionysius remains unedited to date. Parts of it are edited – without an English translation – in W. Wright (1871), *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum acquired since the year 1838*, 494–95, based on the tenth-century manuscript BL Add 12.151. There is a French translation of the entire Prologue of Phocas, including his translations of the Prologues of John and George of Scythopolis, in M. Van Esbroeck (1997), ‘La triple préface syriaque de Phocas’, 171–72, but the translation contains so many errors that it is incomprehensible. This note on Sergius is briefly treated by Aydin in Aydin (2016), 19–20. I am citing both the Prologue and the translation from BL Add 12.151. The note on Sergius is found on fol. 1v–2r. The date of Phocas’ translation was established by Sebastian Brock. See S. Brock (1979), ‘Jacob of Edessa’s Discourse on the Myron’, 21. Unfortunately, this precise dating has not received much publicity and scholars continue to refer to the date of this translation vaguely as ‘late seventh century’
  28. See Aydin (2016), 3.
  29. For all these notes see Aydin (2016), 8–9.
  30. MS BL Add 17202, edited by Brooks (1953) reads ܣܪܓܝܘܣ ܕܪܫܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ, while the excerpt/epitome of MS BL Add 12154 containing the same note reads ܣܪܓܝܘܣ ܕܪܫܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ. While the first variant can either be understood to mean ‘Sergius, the chief physician of Reshaina’ or ‘Sergius the chief physician, from Reshaina’, the second version can only mean ‘Sergius of Reshaina, the chief physician’, which must be the correct meaning.
  31. The expression ܣܪܓܝܘܣ ܕܪܫܝܢܐ means that Sergius was not only capable to read Syriac but also to express himself in that language, either in speech, or writing.
  32. Greatrex et al. (2011), 368: ‘He had read for some time the commentaries of the other teachers of Alexandria on Scripture – he was [also] able to read and speak Syriac – and tracts on medicine.’ Aydin (2016), 4–5: ‘He had studied the interpretation of books by other teachers in Alexandria for some time. He knew Syriac, both reading and speaking, and the books of medicine.’ I think both translations are erroneous. Pseudo-Zachariah says















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## CHAPTER 13

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# JOHN OF SCYTHOPOLIS AND THE DIONYSIAN CORPUS

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BEATE REGINA SUCHLA

JOHN of Scythopolis was the first scholar to extensively strive for the defence and the appreciation of those four treatises and ten letters that had been included in the so-called *Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*, which, by John's times had been received with great controversy. His efforts put him at the beginning of a long succession of high-profile commentators and interpreters, reaching from Maximus the Confessor in the East to Thomas Aquinas in the West<sup>1</sup>.

## THE SCHOLIAST JOHN OF SCYTHOPOLIS

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John lived and worked in Scythopolis (modern-day Bet-Sche'an, Beyt Shean, Beit She'an), which at that time was the metropolis of the old province Palaestina Secunda, only a few kilometres away from Caesarea, the metropolis of the old province Palaestina Prima. Here in Scythopolis, he served as a bishop, probably between 536 and 553<sup>2</sup>.

As a theologian, philosopher, and bishop, John was a prolific writer, but many of his works have been lost to time. Only very few theological treatises survive, for example, fragments of an anti-Monophysite (We prefer the historical terms 'Monophysitism' and 'Monophysite' over the terms 'Miaphysitism' and 'Miaphysite') *Apology for Chalcedon* (CPG 6851), measuring at least eight volumes and apparently written before 518, and of a treatise *Contra Severum* (CPG 6850), which was probably written around 527 against the Monophysite Severus of Antioch. (On the other hand, Rorem and Lamoreaux date the *Apology* to the time between 515 and 518, and *Contra Severum* to the time soon after 520)<sup>3</sup> However, his prologue and scholia to the treatises and letters of Dionysius Areopagita, which he wrote during his tenure as bishop, have survived (for the precise dating see section Dating John's Prologue and Scholia).



In his writings, John proves himself to be a great scholar and universally educated thinker, who was not a mediocre philosopher, but a man of excellent philosophical education<sup>4</sup>. In addition, he appears as a theologian striving for balance. With regards to his works *Contra Severum* and *Apology for Chalcedon*, he can be classified as a Neo-Chalcedonian<sup>5</sup>. John is, in addition, an outstanding contemporary witness, and thus an important source for the Origenist controversy in Palestine following the death of Saint Sabas in 532<sup>6</sup>.

## John as Witness of the Origenist Controversy of the Sixth Century

John witnessed how the controversy around Origen escalated in Palestine<sup>7</sup>; he was finally brought before the Byzantine emperor, who decided on the controversy so strongly in the negative, that he, the emperor, personally published several polemic writings against Origen and his theology—for example, the *Edictum contra Origenem* (*Liber adversus Origenem*) or the *Epistula ad synodum de Origene*—and ordered the destructions of most of Origen's works<sup>8</sup>.

One can assume that John wanted to avoid a similar dispute about the contents of the Dionysian writings<sup>9</sup>. Thus, he had to find a way to deny possible accusations of heresy on the one hand, and refute the charge of depending on Greek philosophy on the other hand, as from an orthodox point of view, both of these weighed much heavier than the question of authorship<sup>10</sup>.

By finding a suitable path for his endeavour and indeed succeeding with it, he simultaneously serves as a source for the 'plague of Origen'<sup>11</sup> in Palestine. Namely, in several scholia, John proves that the following issues were discussed in the Origenist controversy of his time<sup>12</sup>: 1) the denial of the resurrection of the body, and 2) the doctrine of the fall of heavenly minds (noes) into the bodies. John vehemently distances himself and Dionysius from these two claims and calls these doctrines 'monstrous and foolish fables'<sup>13</sup>.

## THE CRITICAL EDITION OF THE *CORPUS DIONYSIACUM AREOPAGITICUM*

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He must have come to the opinion that the best way to fend off accusations of heresy and to refute the claim of dependence on Greek philosophy was to produce a critical edition. In this edition, he proofread the treatises and letters of Dionysius philologically, he added orthodox comments in the form of marginal scholia, and he wrote his own prologue. Furthermore, he added three scholia by John Philoponus<sup>14</sup>, which were prefixed to the Dionysian works as a continuous text:

- The *scholion de philosophis paganis et de authentia operum Dionysii*, which defends the writings against accusations of plagiarism and especially against the accusation of dependence on Proclus, and moreover emphasizes the authenticity of the Dionysian texts (Suchla 1984:185–187; Suchla 1995: 12; 19–20; Suchla 2008: 44–45; 205; 236, Nr. 2).
- The *scholion de operibus deperditis*, which explains to the reader why Dionysius refers in the treatises to writings that are already—i.e. shortly after their origin and dissemination—unobtainable (Suchla 2008: 236–237, Nr. 4).
- The *scholion de quibusdam vocibus a Dionysio usurpatis*, which finally explains the vocabulary of the Dionysian conception of hierarchy and points out that the importance of Dionysius lies indeed in his conception of hierarchy (Suchla 2008: 236–237, Nr. 3).

All of these works were united into a corpus and, in the end, edited too<sup>15</sup>. As all Greek manuscripts of the Dionysian treatises and letters descend from this corpus, and as these texts were copied only together with the prologue and scholia of John of Scythopolis, their interpretation and reception in the East as in the West were fundamentally influenced by him<sup>16</sup>.

## Dating John's Prologue and Scholia

As prologue and scholia refer to each other, they were likely written at the same time. The question when this happened can only be answered approximately, as John probably did not write either text particularly quickly, but over a longer period of time. However, it is now undisputed that he created both during his episcopacy and in the time of the Origenist controversy. Therefore, von Balthasar's dating 'before the Three Chapters controversy, and likely before 520'<sup>17</sup> has been rendered invalid.

Flusin points out that John only refers to those Origenist theses that were condemned in 543, and he thus assumes a dating between 538 and 543<sup>18</sup>. Rorem and Lamoreaux make a similar argument, but with their dating 'written between 537 and 543' they shift the span forwards by one year<sup>19</sup>. Suchla assumes a slightly wider span with the period 'between 536 and 543/553'<sup>20</sup>, while Mazzucchi places the prologue and scholia in the year 548<sup>21</sup>.

## The Layout of the Critical Edition

As discussed earlier<sup>22</sup>, John apparently had access to several manuscripts of the writings of Dionysius, which he either compared himself or had compared by someone else. The variant readings were arranged sometimes interlinearly, sometimes marginally in the critical edition, and thus, an *editio variorum*, in other words, a double *hyparchetypus*, was created<sup>23</sup>. This was a three-columns type<sup>24</sup>, and the sheets were similar to those of the codex Callimachus P.Oxy.20.2258<sup>25</sup>.

The question whether the scholia had been placed as a continuous text, i.e. in the form of *hypomnemata*, or marginally, i.e. in the form of a *catena*, was answered by John himself at the end of his prologue<sup>26</sup>:

There was need for exegetical comments, as detailed as possible, to illustrate the vast range of his erudition. Anyway, with God's help, I have set down at the side by means of scholia, in a somewhat summary manner, as much as the book could hold, the thoughts which occurred to me, according to the order of the treatises which have chanced to come my way thus far.

Here, John distinguishes, implicitly, between *hypomnemata* and marginal *scholia* in that he considers the former to be more comprehensive than the latter, which are always limited by a spatial restriction. Terminologically, John follows the tradition of the late antiquity, in which educated and articulate persons began to distinguish between marginal explanations and those in continuous sections inserted between single portions of the commented work. The latter were called *hypomnemata* and were comprehensive, while the former were called *scholia* and were briefer, not least because the margins of the text left little space for comments. Each scholion, which is always an explanatory remark to a passage from the text, consists of a *lemma*, that is the reference to the passage of the text, and an *interpretamentum*, that is the explanation itself. Nonetheless, a single *scholion* is usually part of a commentary, i.e. a continuous scholarly explanation of a text, which is comprised of several consecutive *scholia* and can extend over all areas of erudition. John's scholia are a good example of this.

So despite the spatial restrictions, John decided on marginal scholia<sup>27</sup> and wrapped them around the treatises in the form of a *catena*, as it was common in the Alexandrian school of Caesarea and especially in the works of Origen; and like this, they can still be seen for example in the Greek Dionysian manuscripts London, British Library, Additions, Cod. 18231, and London, British Library, Additions, Cod. 36821<sup>28</sup>.

## THE TRADITION OF JOHN'S EXEMPLAR

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John's exemplar produced in this way was copied many times, first on parchment, later on paper, and through these copies it spread widely. Today, it can be reconstructed from two reconstructable *hyparchetypi*.

### The *Codex merus*

The first one is a codex that only contains scholia of John of Scythopolis and thus conveys the *pure* tradition of John of Scythopolis. Today, it is represented by seven Greek and four Syriac manuscripts. The Greek manuscripts are<sup>29</sup>:

Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Conventi Soppressi, Cod. 202, before 886;  
 Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. Plut. V. 13, from the eleventh century;  
 Jerusalem, Patriarchal Library, Fonds τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, Cod 23, from the ninth century;  
 London, British Library, Additions, Cod. 18231, from the year 972;  
 London, British Library, Additions, Cod. 36821, from the tenth century;  
 Moscow, State Historical Museum, Cod. 109, from the ninth century;  
 Vienna, Austrian National Library, Cod. Theol. Gr. 110, from the tenth century.

The Syriac manuscripts are<sup>30</sup>:

London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts, Cod. 12 151 from the year 804;  
 London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts, Cod. 12 152 from the year 837;  
 London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts, Cod. 14 539 from the ninth century;  
 London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts, Cod. 14 540 from the ninth century.

## The *Codex mixtus*

The second one is a *codex mixtus*, an exemplar with variant readings of Maximus the Confessor, the most important Greek thinker of the seventh century, who added his own scholia to John's edition<sup>31</sup>.

Some of the Greek manuscripts mentioned above, such as London, British Library, Additions, Cod. 18231, and London, British Library, Additions, Cod. 36821, show us how these additions were entered. There, it is clearly visible that the edition of John of Scythopolis left sufficient space for additional comments, whose lemmata apparently received markings that allow to clearly attribute these additions and scholia to Maximus the Confessor.

The exemplar of Maximus the Confessor, a *codex mixtus* containing the prologue by John of Scythopolis, the three small texts by John Philoponus, the four treatises and ten letters of Dionysius, the scholia attributable to John of Scythopolis, Maximus the Confessor, and further authors<sup>32</sup>, was copied numerous times, where the scholia were soon attributed solely to Maximus the Confessor. In this form, it had a large dissemination, marginalized the tradition of the *codex merus*, and became the prime *textus receptus* of Dionysius. Today, there are 108 known manuscripts of this tradition<sup>33</sup>.

## THE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL IMPORTANCE OF PROLOGUE AND SCHOLIA

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There are several layers to the importance of these texts: on the one hand, they are an example of how a thinker and office-bearer striving for orthodoxy in the first half of the

sixth century understood Dionysius the person and his treatises and letters; this makes them a testimony to the thinking and the theology of the office-bearer himself. On the other hand, they are a testimony to the intellectual history of their time, and thus an example of the philosophy and theology of the first half of the sixth century.

## The prologue

The prologue is a well-thought-out composition of five parts, which are centred around the defence of the orthodoxy of the Dionysian writings. In the first part, the integrity of the author Dionysius is emphasized. In the second part, this integrity is underlined by a digression on the history and importance of the Areopagite council and its members; it is thus stressed that as a member of the Areopagite council, Dionysius had been a highly respected man even before his conversion by Paul. In the third part, the heart of the prologue, the emphasis lies on the orthodoxy of Dionysius' writings. The fourth part is a lament about how widespread the inability to judge heresy and orthodoxy has become; it is then conveyed that the allegations against the author stem from unqualified sources. Simultaneously, it is announced that the treatises and letters will be commented upon mainly from four aspects: doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, creation, and eschatology<sup>34</sup>. John writes<sup>35</sup>:

Rather, some dare to abuse the divine Dionysius with charges of heresy, being themselves absolutely ignorant of matters of heresy. For certainly, if they were to compare his teachings in these works with each of the items condemned among the heretics, they would discover that there is as much distinction between his teachings and those idiocies as there is between true light and darkness. For what could they say of his theology of the only-worshipped trinity? Or what about Jesus Christ, one of this all-blessed Trinity, the only begotten word of God who willed to become fully human? Did [Dionysius] not expound upon the rational soul and the earthly body like ours, and all the other items mentioned by the orthodox teachers? For what error could anyone rightly blame him, with respect to intellegible and intelligent and perceptible things? Or, concerning our general resurrection which will happen with both our body and our soul? And concerning the future judgement of the just and the unjust? To speak in short, our salvation is focused on these points, which it would not be right to go through in detail, since the scholia explicate all these things at the proper time (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998:146).

Finally, in the fifth part, the authenticity of the Dionysian writings is defended.

By beginning and ending the prologue with the defence of the integrity and authenticity of the apostolic Dionysius as the author of the treatises and letters of the corpus, John clearly identifies the implicit author, i.e. the literary figure talking and acting in the texts, with the explicit author, i.e. the real-life person who actually wrote the texts<sup>36</sup>, and he continues this identification in the scholia<sup>37</sup>. The question why he does this cannot be answered in a methodically indisputable way. Thus, there are only hypotheses

circulating about this issue. (For the hypotheses about the author, see the contribution by Suchla, *The Dionysian Corpus*.) Von Balthasar sensed a conspiracy<sup>38</sup>:

War Johannes wirklich von dieser Echtheit überzeugt ...? Sollte Johannes in die Mitwisserschaft, vielleicht in den Freundeskreis des Autors eingeweiht gewesen sein? Es wäre der Mühe wert, diesen Kreis daraufhin näher anzusehen ...

[Was John truly convinced of their authenticity ...? Could John have been privy to the secret, maybe been among the author's circle of friends? It would be worth the effort to investigate this circle in this regard ...]

Mazzucchi even talks of fraud<sup>39</sup>.

Both assumptions—that of collusion and that of fraud—seem daunting to me, especially since John of Scythopolis writes in the style of the Christian tradition of vindication, which provides outstanding examples in Clement of Alexandria or Origen, and since he does so with all his literary force and great persuasiveness. As the origin of the treatises and letters of the literary figure Dionysius Areopagita and the origin of the prologue and scholia of the bishop of Scythopolis are several decades apart, it seems quite possible that even to the bishop, the true author had already faded into history, and that to him, the distinction between the implicit and the explicit author was as impossible as it is to us today. If thus the prologue serves the apologetic purpose to dispel all doubts about the author Dionysius and his treatises and letters, then this is clearly done in the sincerity of a bishop who wished to avoid a dispute about writings that were valuable to him.

His apology is polished and erudite<sup>40</sup>. First, he directly and clearly expresses the problem of the relationship between Christian and Greek pagan philosophy: one cannot accuse Dionysius of heretic thinking because of his pagan sources, for the pagans must be converted through their own reasoning, their pagan philosophy must be transferred to, even transformed into, Christian reasoning. And exactly this, he claims, Dionysius had undertaken and accomplished<sup>41</sup>:

Whoever has been trained with a true knowledge of the invincible traditions of the church can marvel at the orthodoxy and erudition of Dionysius and can contemplate how the bastard teachings of the Greek philosophers have been restored to the truth (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998:146).

It is a shame, John writes, that only few have been capable of such an achievement. It is also a shame that these few are judged by the lazy and ignorant majority. But it is even more of a shame that the ignorant majority passes judgement based on their ignorance instead of being taught otherwise. In these days, John laments, they presume to brand the divine Dionysius as a heretic, even though they have no idea what the heretics are actually teaching. In John's opinion, the anti-pagan achievements of the Areopagite were indisputable, while the appreciation of these achievements was a matter of erudition.

John is playing to the vanity of the reader here, but he reinforces his argument with an undisputable proof by authority: the apostle Paul himself had turned Greek philosophy

into Christian thinking—in Athens, in front of the Areopagite council, where he converted Dionysius, a member of said council, as it was written in the Acts (17: 16–34).

John used this proof by authority as a frame for his prologue, both beginning and ending with it. The penultimate section reads<sup>42</sup>:

He [i.e. Dionysius] writes most of his works to the disciple of the apostle St Paul, the blessed Timothy, bishop of Ephesus, who apparently encountered intrigues from followers of Ionian philosophy at Ephesus, and who consulted the one [i.e. Dionysius] experienced in the philosophy outside, so he, too, might argue better. There was nothing wrong with this, as even the god-beloved apostle Paul employed the sayings of the Greeks after he had heard them from those of his companions who were well-versed in Greek philosophy. This, however, also proves that these writings of Dionysius were truthfully made, that he [i.e. Dionysius] mentioned without duplicity the sayings of his glorious contemporaries, who are also remembered in the divine Acts. And furthermore, the encouraging letters of the god-beloved Paul prove the integrity of these writings, especially the faultlessness of their teachings.

## Imitatio apostoli Pauli

Through the clever use of Paul's speech before the Areopagite council as a frame for the prologue, and through the explanations within this frame, John adumbrated three aspects that present him, too, as a masterful exegete:

1. The purpose of Paul's speech before the Areopagite council within the Acts was to emphasize a relevance of the described historic event that is beyond history. In Athens as the philosophical centre of the pagan world, and in the Areopagite council as a widely known symbol of dignified resolution of conflicts, the author of the Acts, Luke, had chosen the most meaningful place for the confrontation of Christianity with the Greek way of thinking, and he intended Paul, the apostle of pagans, to exemplify this confrontation. Thus, Dionysius and his writings become part of the Pauline tradition beyond history.

2. The Greek philosopher Plato had reflected on the unrecognizability and unspeakability of god. Proclus, the most important source of Dionysius, considered himself a preserver of Platonic thinking; his *magnum opus* is called *Theologia Platonica*. Paul, then, identified the unknown god of the Athenians, and thus of Plato and his preserver Proclus, with the Christian god, when he said (Acts 17: 22–23):

People of Athens, I see that you are very religious. / As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, 'To an Unknown God'. You worship this God, but you don't really know him. So I want to tell you about him.

Under these circumstances, it is not farfetched that Dionysius was not just allowed, but obliged to do the same.



3. The Pauline confrontation with the pagan god was simultaneously a Christian mission programme<sup>43</sup>, attempting to interpret, or rather transform, Greek thinking in a Christian way. Dionysius had undoubtedly succeeded at integrating and transforming Platonic thinking into the Christian doctrine. This makes him a successor of the apostle Paul.

Employing Paul's speech before the Areopagite council as a proof by authority, John (already in the prologue!) responds to any possible critic that Dionysius only tackled Greek thinking in a Christian way, that he only identified the Platonic god, the unknown god of the Athenians, with the Christian god and adapted Platonic thinking to Christianity—out of an *imitatio Pauli*.

Thus, John of Scythopolis is the first to recognize the postulate of an *imitatio apostoli Pauli* formulated by Dionysius for dealing with pagan thinking, which enabled him to base his outstanding hermeneutic and exegetical accomplishments in this regard directly on Dionysius' statements<sup>44</sup>.

## Teacher–Disciple Relationship

By postulating an *imitatio Pauli*, John was able to reference an ethical aspect of the writings of Dionysius<sup>45</sup>, especially as on the one hand, in Greek philosophy, the term *imitatio* had long been linked to ethical thinking<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, the exemplary behaviour of Jesus Christ establishes an imperative that was followed by his disciples<sup>47</sup>. This ethic was closely linked to the idea of a teacher–disciple relationship. Jesus is addressed twenty-nine times directly as 'teacher', and twice (Matthew 10: 24–25, and Luke 6: 40) the relationship between a disciple and his teacher is explained<sup>48</sup>.

Right at the beginning, John emphasized the teacher–disciple relationship between Paul and Dionysius by quoting from the Acts<sup>49</sup>:

So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them (Acts 17: 33–34; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998:144).

In the penultimate section of the prologue, he then derives the legitimacy of reflecting on Greek thinking directly from Paul<sup>50</sup>: 'There was nothing wrong with this, as even the god-beloved apostle Paul employed the sayings of the Greeks.'

Therefore, having read this prologue, the reader should have become aware that the Areopagite's familiarity with Greek thinking was a consequence of an ethical demand resulting from the relationship between Dionysius and Paul.

## The Scholia

Continuing the theme of the prologue, in the scholia, John constantly strives to demonstrate two facts<sup>51</sup>:

1. That Dionysius—as mentioned above, in the intention of an *imitatio Pauli*—transfers the thinking of Greek philosophers into Christian thinking. Here, John takes up central ideas of Plotinus to modify Dionysius' concept significantly, which was shown by Beierswaltes on three examples: the divine name αἰών, the divine νοῦς, and the question of *malum*<sup>52</sup>.

2. That, however, Dionysius strictly rejects all pagan thinking that is heretical, and thus teaches the orthodox doctrine.

An example of this is the theory that the sun is god and ruler of the world, which was supported by thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Proclus<sup>53</sup>, and John clearly shows that Dionysius distances himself from it. John writes<sup>54</sup>:

Nicely and straightaway, the splendid Dionysius then pays attention to the inappropriateness of the statements about the sun. Namely, after he called the soulless sun a *clear image* of the goodness of god and this creation an image of the creator, he now immediately adds the phrase *like a distant echo of good*, and then explains it more in detail later.

John continues further down<sup>55</sup>:

Do not believe that the sun is the cause for the origin, for life, for the descendancy, for growth, or for the perfection of any being, just like no other element, even if it, like water, belongs to the most important necessities.

And finally, he directly attacks the Greeks on this point<sup>56</sup>:

... or to the Greeks' foolish manner of speaking, for they called the sun ancient and primordial, just like it is said in comedy.

As another example of the Dionysius' orthodoxy, John names his opposition to the dualism, a belief held, for instance, in Manichaeism. John vehemently demonstrates that Dionysius advocates against a dualism of principles<sup>57</sup>:

Since he says that even non-being somehow strives for the good and wishes to be in it, which you can also find stated earlier, it is necessary to explain in more detail what is called *non-being*, and why it is said here piously and conclusively that there is only one principle of being, even though this is already discussed in the teachings of the non-Christian philosophers: for in the end, this is mainly a polemic against the non-Christian philosophers and the Manichaeans that lead the bad doctrine.

This opposition gets emphasized a few more times. For instance, he writes<sup>58</sup>: Note these things, for he is in especial contest with the Manichaeans, who thoughtlessly assert a dyadic source of their two contrary principles (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 212).

And in a different passage, he notes<sup>59</sup>:

In order to refute the Greeks and Manichaeans, he says that not even demons are evil by nature ... (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998:213).

John's effort to prove the orthodoxy continues throughout the scholia, which—as announced in the prologue—consider the treatises and letters primarily from four theological aspects: doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, creation, and eschatology. In the following, we will show that in this endeavour, John proves himself a formidable theologian with a precise vocabulary, by looking at his theology of the Trinity and his Christology<sup>60</sup>.

## On Trinity

His understanding of the Trinity is highly precise: According to John, trinity means that god exists in three persons (*hypostases*)—namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit<sup>61</sup>. These three persons are equal and equally eternal and equally omnipotent<sup>62</sup> and form a unity that cannot be sundered<sup>63</sup>. Simultaneously, these three persons are distinguished from one another<sup>64</sup>. For the Father is without beginning<sup>65</sup>, but Son and Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father as generation<sup>66</sup>. The Spirit proceeded from God<sup>67</sup>, the Father<sup>68</sup>. Thus, within God, there are relationships and characteristic properties distinguished from one another, i.e. there is a difference between the essence of God and the divine persons<sup>69</sup>. Nonetheless, the divine hypostases are in one another<sup>70</sup> and each of them is the one true God<sup>71</sup>. Thus, they cannot be separated, neither in their being nor in their activities, and *ad extra* they are a single principle of activity<sup>72</sup>.

This concept of the Trinity is not only precise, but also orthodox. However, when John claims that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father as generation<sup>73</sup>, he follows neither the creed of Constantinople from the year 381 (D–H 150), which states 'we believe ... in the Holy Spirit ... that proceeded from the Father', nor the creed of the Synod of Toledo from the year 400, for this one states (D–H 188):

We believe ... that the Spirit is the helper (*paracletus*), that is neither the Father himself nor the Son, but proceeded from the Father [and from the Son]. So the Father is unbegotten, the Son begotten, the helper not begotten, but proceeding from the Father [and from the Son].

Thus, the attribute *as generation* is an illegitimate addition. That John is missing the *filioque* (and from the Son) can, however, be explained by the fact that this was only added to the creed of Constantinople after the third Synod of Toledo (589; which later caused fierce theological altercations in the eighth century).

## On Christology

On the occasion of his comment on the lemma *among us* (*De div. nom.* 130,5), John drafts a complete Christology; it reads<sup>74</sup>:

Here again, he discusses the economy and links it only to God the Word since neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit are involved in this except by the will alone. Note also the accurate explanation of the economy: God the Word who transcends being took on our form of being without changing, since he remained God, and he took on our form of being *among us, from us, wholly*, i.e. he truly had a body and a rational soul; God the Word is also the one who suffered, and in the flesh; furthermore, all economy is his human and simultaneously divine action; finally, neither the Father nor the Spirit were involved in this except in the decision and the will and in their support for the Son in his divine act of salvation. And remember that these statements are especially aimed against the Nestorians, Acephalians, and Phantasiasts.

When John emphasizes here that in the incarnation of the Word<sup>75</sup> *neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit are involved except by the will alone*, he means that salvation and economy are rooted in the will of the Father, while the Son and the Holy Spirit are bearers of the will of the Father<sup>76</sup>. The subsequent observation that God the Word, who transcends being, took on our form of being without changing, is aimed at Nestorius and his followers, who were accused of denying the hypostatic union<sup>77</sup>.

The next remark, that the Word took on this form of being *among us, from us, wholly*, that is, that it truly had a body and a rational soul, is aimed at the Monophysites, who denied the unconfused distinction of the divine nature and the human nature even after the union.

The following statement that *God the Word is also the one who suffered, and in the flesh*, that *all economy is his human and simultaneously divine action*, and that finally, *neither the Father nor the Spirit were involved in this*<sup>78</sup>, is aimed at the Theopaschites.

The closing mention of the Nestorians, Acephalians, and Phantasiasts, which is found repeatedly in the scholia<sup>79</sup>, is meant to express once more the desire for orthodoxy.

Even though the Christology is 'certainly not at the center of interest'<sup>80</sup> of prologue and scholia, John nonetheless proves himself in this text especially—and also in other passages not mentioned here—a firm advocate of orthodoxy.

John's orthodox interpretations accompanied the treatises and letters of Dionysius Areopagita for centuries throughout the Greek East and the Latin West, and thus they determined and promoted their interpretation and reception fundamentally and with great success.

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## NOTES

1. Suchla 2008: 236–238; 244–245.
2. Suchla 2008: 45; Rorem and Lamoreaux propose a dating after 536 and before 548, Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 27; 36; Grillmeier follows this dating (Grillmeier 2002: 163).
3. Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 35.
4. Von Balthasar 1961: 650.
5. Grillmeier 2002: 160; 162.
6. Grillmeier 2002: 81.
7. Grillmeier 2002: 80.

8. Suchla 1995: 13.
9. Compare the contribution by Suchla, *The Dionysian Corpus* in this volume.
10. Suchla 1995: 14.
11. Grillmeier 2002: 81.
12. Compare Flusin 1983: 25–27; Grillmeier 2002: 81, note 108.
13. PG IV: *In De eccl. hier.* 176 C 31–32.
14. For the attribution to Philoponus see Suchla 2011: 44.
15. Suchla 1985: 188; see also the contribution by Suchla, *The Dionysian Corpus* in this volume.
16. Suchla 1995: 19.
17. Von Balthasar 1961: 670.
18. Flusin 1983: 25; Grillmeier follows this dating; Grillmeier 2002: 163.
19. Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 39; Podolak agrees with this; Podolak 2007: 339.
20. Suchla 2008: 16; 45.
21. Mazzucchi 2014: 170.
22. Suchla, *The Dionysian Corpus* in this volume.
23. Suchla 1985: 185–187.
24. Mazzucchi 2014: 170: ‘John’s codex, a three columns type’.
25. Mazzucchi 2014: 170.
26. PGIV: Prologus 21,38–44; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 148; Suchla 2008: 63; 194; Suchla 2011: 39; 109,3–8; Mazzucchi 2014: 172.
27. Mazzucchi 2014: 170: ‘designed for the margins of the text’.
28. See for example Suchla 1985: Tables 3, 11, 16, 19, 24, 25.
29. Suchla 2011: 40; 54.
30. Suchla 2011: 19; 41.
31. Compare the contribution by Suchla, *The Dionysian Corpus* in this volume.
32. Compare Suchla 2011: 47–51.
33. Suchla 2011: 22–37.
34. Rorem 1997: 188; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 66–67.
35. PG IV: Prologus 20, 10–30; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 146; Suchla 2011: 105,1–106,8.
36. For implicit authorship as a stylistic device, see the contribution by Suchla, *The Dionysian Corpus* in this volume.
37. Compare e.g. PG IV: 185 A 7; Suchla 2011: 114, 3.
38. Von Balthasar 1961: 670.
39. Mazzucchi 2014: 171: ‘a grandiose historical forgery’; Mazzucchi 2017: 289: ‘forgery ... fake’.
40. Suchla 1995: 14–19.
41. PG IV: Prologus 17, 44–49; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 146; Suchla 2011: 104,1–5.
42. PG IV: Prologus 20,48–21,11; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 147–148; Suchla 2011: 108, 1–109,2.
43. Haenchen 1977: 509–510.
44. Suchla 1995: 14–17.
45. Suchla 1995: 16.
46. Compare the *Democritus fragment* 39, Diels and Kranz 1952: 155; Democritus also stressed the voluntative motivation, that is, the free decision for this act (*fragment* 79, Diels and Kranz 1952: 160).
47. Schulz 1962; Gnifka 1990: 166–193.
48. Rengstorff 1990: 154.
49. PG IV: Prologus 16,18–22; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 144; Suchla 2011: 98,6–9.

50. PG IV: *Prologus* 20,53–21,3; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 148; Suchla 2011: 108,6–9.
51. Suchla 1995: 17–18.
52. Beierwaltes 1972: 3–7; see also Beierwaltes and Kannicht 1968 as well as Frank 1987.
53. See Suchla 1988: 114, note 86.
54. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 248,7–13; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 202; Suchla 2011: 221,2–7.
55. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 248,25–29; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 202–203; Suchla 2011: 222,8–11.
56. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 249,39–41; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 204; Suchla 2011: 227,3–5.
57. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 272,1–6; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 208; Suchla 2011: 258,8–12.
58. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 285,16–18; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 212; Suchla 2011: 279,3–4.
59. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 289,1–2; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 213; Suchla 2011: 284,4–5.
60. When I wrote this article in 2018, Nigra's book (Nigra 2019) had not yet been published.
61. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 196,17–19; 212,19–23; 213,36–41; 216,4–6; Suchla 2011: 134,1–2; 161,7–162,1; 166,7–167,2; 168,5–7.
62. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 192,3; 213,28–29; 200,26–27; 208,20–30; 221,8; Suchla 2011: 125,7; 142,1–2; 154,5–155,7; 166,4–5; 178,3.
63. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 212,8–9; 212,31–33; Suchla 2011: 161,5–6; 162,6–7.
64. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 216,9–15; Suchla 2011: 169,1–5.
65. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 189,35–36; 221,1–11; 252,37; Suchla 2011: 123,5; 177,5–178,5; 230,7.
66. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 196,17–19; 220,48–49; Suchla 2011: 134,1–2; 177,3.
67. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 189,47; Suchla 2011: 125,1.
68. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 216,39–40; 221,8–9; Suchla 2011: 171,4–5; 178,2–4.
69. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 212,24–28; 220,48–50; Suchla 2011: 162,2–5; 177,3.
70. Trinitarian *perichoresis*; PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 217,52–220,2; Suchla 2011: 175,1–3.
71. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 212,47–213,1; Suchla 2011: 164,1–4.
72. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 212,19–23; 213,14–31; 221,16–17; Suchla 2011: 161,7–162,1; 165,2–166,6; 178,9–11.
73. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 196,17–19; 220,48–49; Suchla 2011: 134,1–2; 177,3.
74. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 221,46–224,7; Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 197; Suchla 2011: 180,3–181,6.
75. For this, see also scholia PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 216,16–30; 221,43–44; Suchla 2011: 169,6–170,7; 180,1–2.
76. Compare PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 361,41–42; Suchla 2011: 385,14–15, where it is said that the Trinity has only one single will.
77. On the hypostatic union, see also the scholia PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 196,36–197,15; 212,31–41; Suchla 2011: 135,1–137,6; 162,6–163,3.
78. See the scholion PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 196,41; Suchla 2011: 135,4, where it is said that only one of the hypostases was fastened to the cross, furthermore the scholion PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 196,36–37; Suchla 2011: 135,1–2, where he states that only one of the hypostases wholly participated in us, and the scholion PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 216,16–17; Suchla 2011: 169,6, where it is said that God the Word alone became incarnate; similarly, the scholion PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 360,42–361,42; Suchla 2011: 382,3–385,15, claims that the union of human nature happened with the Word alone.
79. See e.g. PG IV: *In De div. nom.* 196,42; 197,42–43; 209,51–52; Suchla 2011: 135,5; 139,7; 160,2–3.
80. Grillmeier 2002: 163.

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## CHAPTER 14

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# MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR AND THE RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

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MAXIMOS CONSTAS

ACTIVE at a time when Greek patristic theology and Neoplatonic philosophy had reached their greatest maturity, Maximus the Confessor (580–662) made creative use of a wide range of philosophical and theological sources. His anthropology was inspired by the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395), while his ascetic theology was drawn largely from the work of Evagrius of Pontus.<sup>1</sup> His interpretation of Scripture closely followed the hermeneutics of Philo and Origen.<sup>2</sup> One can point to other influences as well, including Gregory Nazianzus, Nemesius of Emesa, and Leontius of Byzantium.<sup>3</sup> Maximus' philosophical sources, on the other hand, have proven difficult to identify with any certainty, though his conceptual categories and concerns are consistent with the Platonizing Aristotelianism characteristic of contemporary schools and writers.<sup>4</sup> In assessing Maximus' reception of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, for which he also wrote a series of *scholia*, one must take into account the diversity of influences on his thought,<sup>5</sup> the creative synthesis in which he combined them, and their subordination to the needs of his own theological projects.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, comparing Dionysius and Maximus is a complicated venture. As arguably one of the most allusive and complex thinkers (and writers) in the entire canon of Greek patristic literature, Maximus' use of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (henceforth *CD*) was equally allusive and complex. Deeply sympathetic to Dionysius's Christian Neoplatonism, Maximus likewise saw the world as a theophany of the divine, a manifestation of intelligible reality in sensible form. Yet he absorbed Dionysian vocabulary and conceptual structures not in reverential isolation, but in an animated and at times contentious conversation with the doctrinal and spiritual traditions of patristic theology as a whole. Possessed of a powerfully independent mind, Maximus drew slavishly on none of his philosophical or theological predecessors. To this rule Dionysius was no exception, and Maximus did not hesitate to adjust and modify some of the signature features of the Areopagite's theology.

This is not to suggest that Maximus saw himself as somehow in conflict with Dionysius, whom he revered as a divinely inspired teacher,<sup>7</sup> but rather that Maximus was developing positions that he believed were implicit in the theology of the *CD*. These developments were required in part by Maximus' response to Origenism, which also addressed fundamental and long-standing problems in Christian Neoplatonism. Central to this larger project was Maximus' doctrine of the *logoi*, which enabled him to place greater importance than Dionysius had on the informing, personal presence of the Logos in the dynamism of creation, and to establish the Incarnation as the central act of divine self-manifestation. The greater role given to Christology was necessitated by the increasingly sophisticated doctrine of Christ expounded by Maximus himself throughout the seventh-century Christological controversy. In a critical move, Maximus regrounded the Dionysian metaphysical cycle of procession and return (described later) in the person of the incarnate Logos, and, by extension, in the synaxis of the Byzantine liturgy—where, as we shall see, the Confessor's differences with the Areopagite are particularly pronounced.

Jaroslav Pelikan was thus correct in stating that Maximus' 'primary achievement as interpreter of the *corpus Areopagiticum*' was his 'orthodox restatement of the Dionysian structure both in his theology and even more in his spirituality', so that 'what Maximus achieved was nothing less than the restoration of the balance between Neoplatonism and Christian orthodoxy.' Pelikan argues that Maximus reached this balance by the introduction of a 'Christocentric piety whose roots lie deep in the Cappadocian tradition of Basil and the two Gregorys.'<sup>8</sup> If Dionysius had successfully exposed and articulated the philosophical principles implicit in Cappadocian theology and spirituality, he could not have accounted for subsequent developments in Orthodox Christology, nor anticipated Maximus' decisive use of a Logos Christology in his reconfiguration of Neoplatonic and Origenist metaphysics. It thus remained for Maximus, as the 'principal exponent of orthodox Christological spirituality in the seventh century, to explain the language of Dionysius in such a manner that he achieved the Trinitarian and Christocentric re-orientation of the Dionysian system.' Pelikan concludes by noting that Maximus' role as an 'interpreter and re-interpreter of Dionysius the Areopagite' grants him a 'significant place in the history of Christian spirituality', insofar as 'he turned apophatic theology and spirituality around, from the speculative nihilism that was the potential outcome of apophaticism back to a concentration on the person of Jesus Christ.'<sup>9</sup> In what follows, these points will be considered in detail, but first it will be helpful to address some preliminary matters, beginning with the question of Maximus and the *scholia* on the *CD*.

## THE SCHOLIA OF JOHN OF SCYTHOPOLIS

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The more than 1600 *scholia* on the *CD* were long thought to be the work of Maximus the Confessor, the premier interpreter of Dionysius, who, it was believed, single-handedly secured the Areopagite's lasting place in Christian theology, and influenced all subsequent readings of the *CD*. This view was effectively challenged by Hans Urs von

Balthasar, and definitively overturned by Beate Regina Suchla, who demonstrated that the vast majority of the *scholia* were produced, not by Maximus the Confessor, but a century earlier by John of Scythopolis.<sup>10</sup> Maximus did indeed write a number of *scholia* on the *CD*, but after the work of Suchla they no longer commanded the attention of scholars, who for the most part have tended to ignore them, assuming that the Confessor's engagement with Dionysius was minimal.<sup>11</sup>

Such an assumption, however, is premature, since the majority of Maximus' *scholia* remain unedited, are difficult of access, and have not been the subject of proper scholarly study. In 2011, a critical edition of the *scholia* on the *DN* was published, which allows for a partial assessment of the Confessor's work as a scholiast.<sup>12</sup> The results are not unpromising. In the first place, Maximus' *scholia* are significant both in terms of their content and length (some being more than twenty lines long). They reveal Maximus's careful study of the *DN*, as well as the principles of interpretation he brought to it, as can be seen in the following examples.<sup>13</sup> In a *scholion* on *DN* 10.2, Maximus explains Dionysius' notion that the divinity is both 'ancient and new' with a gloss from Hebrews 14: 8 ('Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever'), simultaneously interpreting Dionysius in light of Paul, and taking the generic category of 'divinity' as a reference to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God.<sup>14</sup> Maximus' interest in Christology is further evident in a *scholion* on *DN* 3.2, in which he understands the language of 'divine weakness' as a reference to the Incarnation. In this lengthy *scholion* of twenty-five lines, Maximus enumerates in detail the human experiences and sufferings of the Word made flesh, employing rich Christological citations from Paul (Galatians 3:13; Philippians 2:8; and 1 Corinthians 2:8), and connecting the notion of 'divine weakness' with 2 Cor. 13:4 ('He was crucified in weakness').<sup>15</sup> Maximus' detailed and lengthy accounting of Christ's sufferings is particularly striking, since Dionysius nowhere offers any such description anywhere in the *CD*. The *scholion* tells us much about what Maximus thought was insufficiently articulated in the *CD*, and he did not lose the opportunity to amplify what Dionysius had alluded to only in passing.<sup>16</sup>

Maximus' reading of Dionysius did not, of course, take place in isolation. Like virtually all late-antique and Byzantine readers of the *CD*, Maximus received and read Dionysius through the interpretive lens of John of Scythopolis' *scholia*. These *scholia*, moreover, did not simply shape Maximus' understanding of Dionysius, but were instrumental in the formation of his own theological language and ideas, ranging from technical terms to complex concepts that we now recognize as central to his thought.<sup>17</sup> This is especially true with respect to Maximus' doctrine of the divine *logoi*, the signature piece in his philosophical system, whose intricate lineage owes far more to the *CD* and the *scholia* than has been generally recognized.<sup>18</sup>

In an effort to mitigate Dionysius' perceived emanationism or pantheism, John's *scholia* consistently highlight the role of the divine will in creation, eliminating any suggestion of creation's necessity or eternity. In particular, John emphasizes that what God willed to do in creation was to bring into existence beings based on 'paradigms' that pre-existed in God's mind.<sup>19</sup> Maximus had similar concerns, and adopted the notion that the divine paradigms were identical with the *logoi* understood as the 'wills' of

God. In this way, Maximus successfully ruled out any question of the independent existence of the paradigms, and excluded the possibility that created beings pre-existed their manifestation in the physical world. Maximus' argument is consistent with a series of passages in the DN, read through the lens of John's *scholia*.<sup>20</sup> The most important of these is DN 5.8, where Dionysius identifies the *logoi* with the 'divine wills', which Maximus cites as a proof text in *Ambigua* 7.24, and again (in abbreviated form) in the *Responses to Thalassios* 13.2.<sup>21</sup> Maximus makes this identification the foundational principle of his doctrine, yet this is the *only* time Dionysius describes the paradigms as both *logoi* and divine wills, and the only time he uses the word 'will' in the plural. For Maximus, DN 5.8 was important enough not only to cite in the *Ambigua*, but also to write a *scholion* for, in which he distinguishes the Dionysian paradigms from Platonic ideas, and affirms once again their identification with the 'wills' of God.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, Maximus' systematic preference for the term *logoi* (which is not a feature of John's *scholia*) was largely intended to salvage the positive elements of Origenism by replacing the ontologically problematic 'rational entities' (*logika onta*) with the divine *logoi* understood as the voluntary self-manifestation and intentionality of the Logos for the purposes of creation and salvation.

## CITATIONS AND ALLUSIONS

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Throughout his writings, Maximus directly cites about thirty passages from the *CD*, some of them lengthy, usually mentioning Dionysius by name, and in some cases providing the title of the work.<sup>23</sup> The majority of these citations are found in the *Ambigua to John*, which is Maximus' philosophical *magnum opus*.<sup>24</sup> The *Responses to Thalassios*, a work of biblical exegesis, contains no direct citations, and does not mention Dionysius by name, but is nonetheless deeply indebted to Dionysian hermeneutics, and employs significant philosophical material.<sup>25</sup> The introduction contains an essay on the nature of evil, which closely follows DN 4.18–20 (on which Maximus also wrote a *scholion*).<sup>26</sup> The *Questions and Doubts* contains several references to the *CD*.<sup>27</sup> In general, Maximus thoroughly absorbed Dionysian vocabulary, so that Dionysian terms, phrases, and images are scattered throughout his writings as integral elements of his own thought and expression.<sup>28</sup> Altogether, Maximus' use of Dionysius is fairly impressive, especially when we recall that Maximus does not cite patristic authors with any great frequency.<sup>29</sup> The evidence suggests that Maximus made direct use of the *CD* largely for philosophical purposes in the *Ambigua to John*, for exegetical purposes in the *Responses to Thalassios*, and for Christological purposes in the *Ambigua to Thomas*, the *Opuscula*, and in the Christological essays that are Letters 12–19. These latter are mostly limited to reiterations of the disputed Dionysian formula 'one theandric energy', as in the *Opuscula*, where it is cited several times.<sup>30</sup> The *Ambigua to Thomas* 5 is an important, line-by-line analysis of Dionysius, Letter 4, which was the source of the contested phrase.<sup>31</sup> In the *Mystagogy*, finally, where we might have expected Maximus to exhibit close dependence on the EH, he finds a way, as we shall see later, of significantly distancing himself from Dionysius.



## MAXIMUS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF DIONYSIAN NEOPLATONISM

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As mentioned earlier, Maximus adopted the Christian Neoplatonic framework of Dionysius, the central principles of which included the radical transcendence and immanence of God; the notion of being as a theophany; the cycle of remaining, procession, and return; together with a cognate philosophy of mind and language marked by strong aesthetic, affective, and erotic elements. Maximus' development of a number of trajectories within this complex system set him apart, not simply from Dionysius, but from Neoplatonic metaphysics more generally.<sup>32</sup> To illustrate Maximus' modification of the Dionysian tradition, it will be helpful to focus on the changes he introduced into the foundational metaphysical process of remaining, procession, and return.

As is well known, late Neoplatonists described this process as a cycle comprising three distinct but interrelated moments: (1) the moment of 'remaining' of the transcendent source or cause within itself; (2) the moment of the source's 'procession' in an outward stream of energy; and (3) the final moment of 'reversion' or 'return' of the stream to its source. Neoplatonists were aware of various philosophical problems within this structure. Christian thinkers in particular were concerned about its ontological monism and the reduction of God's generative and creative activity to automatism and necessity.<sup>33</sup> Maximus was perhaps the first to address these problems directly, and he did so by reorganizing and redefining each moment within the process.

### REMAINING

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Confronted with the statement that creatures had 'flowed down from above',<sup>34</sup> Maximus rejected the basic principle that beings pre-existed in a state of primal unity with God, from which they descended and entered the sensible world. Instead, Maximus argued that the state of 'remaining' (*mone*) was to be found, not at the beginning of the process, but at its end.<sup>35</sup> While Neoplatonic forms of remaining are found throughout the *CD* (cf. DN 2.8), Dionysius' position on this question was ambiguous. His citation of John 14:23 ('We will make our abode [*mone*] with him') in EH 2.1, for example, seems to posit remaining as a future condition, which would (if this was his intention) signal a fundamental restatement of the traditional Neoplatonic view. The definitive change, however, was achieved by Maximus, who reformulated the traditional notion, which he dismissed as a 'doctrine of the Greeks'.<sup>36</sup> In so doing, Maximus had, in the words of Stephen Gersh, 'undermined the most cherished principle of pagan and earlier Christian Platonism', namely, the 'placing of remaining before procession'.<sup>37</sup> This move, though often noted, had farreaching implications for Maximus' eschatology and teleology, and also for his understanding of protology, which have yet to be fully explored.



## PROCEEDING

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Maximus also modified the second moment in the cycle, 'procession'. For Dionysius, the divine 'processions'—which he variously calls powers, participations, providences, manifestations, activities, and distributions of God—signify the presence of God 'outside' His essence, which refers to God's causal presence in beings as their intelligible determinations.<sup>38</sup> Dionysius does not hesitate to speak of the divine processions as 'overflowing outpourings of light' (DN 5.6), along with other metaphors of diffusion and radiation, which could imply that creation came about by necessity. However, Dionysius' emphasis here is more likely on the non-substantial character of these processions in a deliberate rejection of Neoplatonic self-subsisting 'henads' (intermediary entities).<sup>39</sup> Maximus adopts some of the same language and imagery, but for him the 'processions' are no longer the self-diffusing activities of a generic First Principle, but rather the multiplication of the Logos into a plurality of *logoi*.<sup>40</sup> Thus Dionysius' attempt to eliminate intermediaries by locating the source of multiplicity within the First Principle was given a new twist by Maximus, who identified the source of procession with the person of the Logos. While this is not exactly the sort of 'Christological corrective' that some scholars have posited,<sup>41</sup> it nonetheless marks a significant Christological reframing of both Dionysian thought and the Neoplatonic tradition more generally, for it was a massive reinscription of the Dionysian world view within the framework of the Confessor's Christocentric cosmology.<sup>42</sup>

## HIERARCHY

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Before turning to the final moment in the process, it will be helpful to consider a particular feature of procession, namely, hierarchy, which brings to light a pivotal difference between Dionysius and Maximus. In Neoplatonism, the outward procession of the First Principle generated a hierarchical structure of being composed of distinct levels of super- and subordination, the existence and activity of whose lower, inferior levels were contingent on the contemplation and imitation of their superiors. For Dionysius, who coined the word 'hierarchy', procession is likewise inseparable from the production of a hierarchical order of intermediary beings,<sup>43</sup> and thus even the activity of the angelic orders is frequently expressed in terms of providence and procession.<sup>44</sup> Each particular order and level of the hierarchy is thus a force that reveals, turns, and leads the lower levels back to their source in God.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, these orders constitute impenetrable boundaries between levels of reality that were firmly set and could not be transgressed.<sup>46</sup>

Maximus, on the other hand, never uses the word 'hierarchy'.<sup>47</sup> In place of vertiginous Dionysian verticality, Maximus' doctrine of the divine *logoi* generates something akin

to a non-spatial model, in which presence and dependence are collapsed—like ‘stars vanishing at the appearance of the sun’<sup>48</sup>—into the immediate and dynamic continuum of Logos, *logoi*, and beings. This new model also found expression in a novel ordering of reality, not into Dionysian hierarchies, but into the five divisions of being described in *Amb.* 41. Here the primary division is into uncreated and created natures, which are transcended and unified in the person of the incarnate Logos.<sup>49</sup> Consistent with this reconceptualization of the Dionysian universe, movement across these new ontological boundaries was surprisingly simple and depended on the freely determined capacities of each participant. The most striking example of this is Maximus’s account, in *Amb.* 20, of Paul’s ascent (cf. 2 Cor 12:2–4) through all the angelic orders, terminating in a condition of absolute immediacy with God, beyond all negation, boundary, and limit.<sup>50</sup> Dionysius, on the other hand, never cites the Pauline verse in question, and avoids any suggestion of upward movement through the hierarchy, which would problematically transgress, and allow a more perfect union with, the very divine activity that established creatures in their fixed locations within the hierarchy.<sup>51</sup>

## RETURNING

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With respect to the final moment of ‘reversion’ or ‘return’, the Confessor once again departed from the traditional view.<sup>52</sup> Maximus’ decision, noted earlier, to place ‘remaining’ at the *end* of the process was a radical shift that required a corresponding re-definition of the final moment of return. Rational creatures, and through them the entire created order, were now seen in terms of their final, eschatological goal, which was no longer understood as a mere return to the beginning, but rather as an ontologically unprecedented union with God in an ultimate, divinizing consummation. As a result, the eternal recurrence inherent in the cycle of procession and return was largely displaced by a dynamic linear movement, with a new emphasis on progression in time towards eschatological fulfilment.<sup>53</sup> This was a highly innovative development,<sup>54</sup> and is reflected in Maximus’ avoidance of the traditional word ‘return’ (*epistrophe*), which he never uses.<sup>55</sup> In one passage, he uses the word in its adjectival form, ‘revertive’ or ‘convertive’ (*epistreptike*), coupled with a second adjective, ‘inductive’ or ‘guiding’ (*cheiragogike*), qualifying the words *anaphora* and *pronoia*, which together have replaced *epistrophe*. It is significant that this passage occurs in Maximus’ most important statement about the one Logos being many *logoi* according to ‘procession’ and the many *logoi* being one Logos according to the movement of ‘return’ (*anaphora*).<sup>56</sup>

In his analysis of this passage, Vladimir Cvetković has pointed out that Maximus’ language implies two agents.<sup>57</sup> The adjective ‘inductive’ (*cheiragogike*) points to the active role of divine providence, guiding and directing rational beings towards their proper end. The noun *anaphora*, on the other hand, is the liturgical movement and self-offering of rational beings to God.<sup>58</sup> For Cvetković this marks the regrounding of ontology in Christology, with particular emphasis on the incarnate Logos: ‘By offering themselves

to God, human beings follow the example of God, who by taking human nature, offered Himself to the world.<sup>59</sup> In the word *antistrophe*, which Maximus also uses as a substitute for *epistrophe*,<sup>60</sup> Cvetković sees the same reciprocity between the divine and the human, the ‘paradigmatic exchange that makes God man and man God.’<sup>61</sup> There is a precedent for this formula in Dionysius, in the opposite yet converging movements of inferiors to superiors, and of superiors to inferiors, mutually attracted and bound together by the motive force of love.<sup>62</sup> This reciprocal exchange of humanity and divinity brings us back to equilibrium of the cycle of procession and return, now tightly coiled within the person of the incarnate Logos.

## ..... APOPHATIC THEOLOGY AND CHRISTOLOGY

Apophatic theology is a vital element in Dionysian thought, and also figures prominently in the work of Maximus the Confessor. For both writers, the *via negativa* is not reducible to a set of rules governing the correct use of religious language, still less is it merely a question of what God is not. Instead, the apophatic and the cataphatic mutually condition each other, since the only possibility of saying what God is *not* depends on what God *is*, in the sense of what God has already revealed himself to be.

This interplay of the cataphatic and the apophatic was as important to Dionysius as it was to Maximus,<sup>63</sup> and there is a good example of the latter’s use of it in his discussion of Paul’s ascent to the ‘third heaven’ (2 Cor. 12:2), which we noted a moment ago.<sup>64</sup> Paul’s celestial journey, Maximus suggests, was a progressive ascent through the angelic orders. The ascent itself took place through a process of negation and affirmation, so that the negation of angelic knowledge on one level raised the Apostle to the affirmation of a new form of knowledge on a higher level.<sup>65</sup> Paul’s upward movement reached its climax in his union with God, who is beyond all motion, at which Paul was led to the ‘immediate negation of knowledge concerning God, a negation beyond any positive affirmation by absolutely any being, since there is no longer any boundary or limit that could define or frame the negation’.

Beyond such relatively conventional construals of affirmation and negation, Maximus saw an even greater purpose for apophatic theology, and, just as he had transposed the Neoplatonic cycle of procession and return into a Christological key, he made apophatic theology central to the self-revelation of the Logos in the incarnation. Maximus first began to fuse Dionysian apophatic theology with Christology in his *Questions and Doubts*. In this early work, God is said to ‘apophatically transcend all beings’, and is subject to neither thought nor speech, being beyond participation. However, according to his ‘providential procession’, the same God becomes participable by many, so that each participant becomes a ‘member’ of God ‘in the body of Christ’ (Eph. 1:23). Maximus notes that such participation is realized only when the beings in question move according to their inner *logos*, in a manner that is both wise and rational, otherwise their movement is towards non-being.<sup>66</sup>

In this passage, the interplay of negation and affirmation is not simply a dialectic enabling a cognitive ascent, as in Paul's upward movement through the celestial hierarchy, but instead is a fundamental feature of the incarnate Logos and of the manner in which he reveals the transcendent divinity. Contextualizing negation and affirmation in relation to Christology had no real parallel in Dionysius, even though Dionysius provided Maximus with the presuppositions for the possibility of such a development.

Maximus's thinking on this subject is fully developed in his interpretation of the Transfiguration of Christ, which receives elaborate treatment in *Amb.* 10.<sup>67</sup> The principal dynamic of this event arises from the paradox of the two natures of Christ, which interpenetrate without being changed or confused (following the Christological doctrine of Chalcedon). Building on Dionysius' insight that 'the Word of God remains hidden after His manifestation, or to speak more divinely, even in His manifestation',<sup>68</sup> Maximus observes that the (cataphatic) manifestation of the invisible Word is possible only through the same Word's (apophatic) concealment in visible flesh. The more the human appears, the more the divine is concealed. The more the divine appears, as in the Transfiguration, the more the human element is concealed precisely to the extent that it reveals, and these 'symbols' (as Maximus calls them) reveal precisely to the extent they conceal.<sup>69</sup> For both Dionysius and Maximus, any manifestation of God can never be absolutely comprehensive with God himself, who is revealed only by being concealed in his very manifestation. Maximus therefore exhorts his readers to 'make manifest what is hidden by means of an apophatic negation', so that they might be 'lifted up from written words and visible things to the Logos Himself'.<sup>70</sup> As Maximus states elsewhere, this concealment or hiddenness of the divinity is not simply an 'economic' function of the incarnation, but is an essential attribute of the divinity itself.<sup>71</sup>

## THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY AND THE MYSTAGOGY

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Dionysius' *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (EH) and Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogy* have the distinction of being the earliest commentaries, respectively, on the Eucharistic synaxis and the Divine Liturgy. The relationship between these two works is not immediately apparent, and while several scholars have argued that the *Mystagogy* closely follows the EH, this is, as we shall see, not the case.<sup>72</sup>

The *Mystagogy* is Maximus' retelling of an interpretation of the church building and its rituals that he heard from an anonymous 'great elder'.<sup>73</sup> This elder, who is the ostensible source of Maximus' doctrine, is not to be confused with Dionysius, though readers have been making this mistake since the Byzantine period.<sup>74</sup> As Maximus explains in the work's prologue, he had earlier spoken of the elder's interpretations, after which he was asked to write them down in detail.<sup>75</sup> That the *Mystagogy* is introduced to its readers as the teachings of an anonymous elder is a framing device that, among other things,

serves to distance the *Mystagogy* from the EH, not unlike the framing devices that introduce a number of Platonic dialogues. After describing his encounter with the elder and his remarkable qualities as an inspired teacher, Maximus turns to Dionysius, but only to announce that he will not be drawing on the Areopagite's work: 'Insofar as the symbols of the sacred synaxis have been considered by Dionysius the Areopagite in his treatise *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, one should know that the present work will not repeat these same things, nor will it proceed in the same manner as he did'.<sup>76</sup>

The reason that Maximus distances himself from Dionysius would seem to be due to the relatively weak presence of eschatology in the EH.<sup>77</sup> From Maximus' point of view, the EH did not emphasize sufficiently the 'anaphoric' ascent and return of all creatures to God, and in general lacked the robust commitment to eschatology that was central to the Confessor's theological vision. A *scholion* on the EH had already found Dionysius' muted eschatology to be a problem.<sup>78</sup> Whereas Dionysius speaks of a downward movement from effects to causes regarding liturgical symbols, the *scholion* stresses, not a contrasting upward movement, but an eschatological movement from 'shadows to images to truth' (cf. Heb. 10:1). This is the same argument that Maximus makes in *Amb.* 21, which also cites the verse from Hebrews, suggesting the possibility that Maximus himself was the author of this *scholion*.<sup>79</sup>

To be sure, the EH speaks of the 'uplifting' of the mind through the ritual symbols, and states that the goal of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is assimilation to and unity with God.<sup>80</sup> These references, however, are sporadic and allusive, and are not the primary focus of the EH. Instead, Dionysius is concerned with the descending movement, and with the fact that liturgical symbols are sensible expressions of noetic realities. He further states that such symbols are relatively low on the great chain of being, situated somewhere between corporeal observances and the sublimity of the intellect.<sup>81</sup> Again, the overall emphasis is on the descent and concealment of the intelligible in the sensible, not on the eschatological movement of return.

## CONCLUSION

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The allusive and often abstruse writings of Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor resist simple, systematic summary or facile closure, and as such have yielded interpretations that are often mutually contradictory. This problem is particularly acute in the case of the *CD*, inasmuch as the author's anonymity encourages virtually limitless speculation concerning his philosophical and theological antecedents, orientation, and intentions. With respect to Dionysius' philosophical lineage, there is no question that he was directly influenced by the writings of Proclus (*d.* AD 485), but we have no such certainty regarding Maximus' relationship to the philosophical schools and traditions of the seventh century. If Dionysius reflects the Neoplatonic philosophy taught in Athens and Alexandria from around the fourth to the sixth century, Maximus appears to be much less closely aligned to any particular school tradition, and all attempts to tie him

to one have proven inconclusive. It does seem clear, however, that Maximus derived his Neoplatonism, not only from Dionysius, but also from many other intermediaries, even if Dionysius was the major source of influence.

Maximus' reception of the Dionysian tradition was largely governed by his struggle against the Origenist doctrine of the fall of rational beings from a timeless union with God. In response to this doctrine, Maximus forwarded a radically different cosmology and anthropology, according to which creaturely movement was not the result of a primordial fall, but the natural capacity of the creature to advance towards God. Central to Maximus' transformation of Origenism was a revision of the Origenist triad of *stasis*–*kinesis*–*genesis* to *genesis*–*kinesis*–*stasis*, so that an original condition of stasis was replaced by creation (*genesis*) moving dynamically towards its eschatological rest in God.<sup>82</sup> Maximus surely realized that the three moments in the Neoplatonic cycle closely corresponded to the Origenist account: 'remaining' was the primal state (*stasis*) of the spiritual world (the *henad*), 'procession' was the fall (*kinesis*) and the emergence of the material world, while 'return' (*epistrophe*) was the gnostic escape from matter.

If we accept the notion that Dionysius' immutable hierarchies were a response to Origenism, they offered an ontologically stable universe in contrast to a fluid metaphysical system in which individual identity and corporeality were the results of a pre-cosmic fall, to be dispensed with in a gnostic ascent towards immateriality. Maximus of course accepted the ontological stability of the Dionysian universe, but reoriented it in his eschatological vision of the incarnate Logos as the beginning and end of the cosmic drama. If Dionysius' concern was to stabilize Origenian flux, Maximus' concern was to establish the primacy of the end, the eschatological goal (*telos*) of creation in the Logos, because Dionysius had not made a clear and definitive break with the entrenched cycle of remaining, procession, and return, which Maximus completely reconfigured. Though an ordered and stable cosmos remained, the rigid hierarchies were no longer central, since now it was the desire of the Logos, through the *logoi*, to be immanent in all beings—in the fabric of creation, the text of Scripture, the body of Christ, and in every human soul—in such a way that eliminated the need for mediating hierarchies.

We read Maximus' work with an ear for Dionysian resonances, which are resoundingly there, but there is also dissonance. While the resonances indicate where the two thinkers meet and converge, the dissonant notes reiterate that Maximus' engagement with Dionysius was a creative one, attuned to a different set of problems, requiring him—to use a Maximian phrase—to innovate the modes of Dionysian doctrine without altering their principle of being.

## NOTES

1. For references, see Constan, 'Maximus the Confessor' (2017), 1, nn. 1–2.
2. On which, see Blowers, 'Exegesis of Scripture' (2015), 253.
3. As well as Mark the Monk, Macarius/Symeon, Diadochus of Photike, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyril of Alexandria; cf. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (1996), 19–32; and Törönen, *Union and Distinction* (2007), 14–15.



4. Lackner, 'Studien zur philosophischen Schultradition' (1962), was one of the first to identify and catalog these connections; see now the thorough investigation by Mueller-Jourdan, *Typologie spatio-temporelle* (2005).
5. A point rightly emphasized by Völker, 'Der Einfluss des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita' (1960), 244; and again in id., Walther Völker, 'Der Einfluss des Pseudo-Dionysius auf Maximus Confessor' (1961), 333.
6. Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy* (2003), 58: 'It would be a mistake to choose one of [Maximus's] intellectual worlds as the *real* one and to judge the rest by its standard. At best one can say this: inasmuch as the Pseudo-Dionysius was historically the last and most comprehensive theological and spiritual phenomenon before Maximus, and insofar as he includes essential elements of his predecessors (Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Evagrius) in his own thought, in a way that both corrects and surpasses them, his insight can be accorded a certain preeminence in Maximus' intellectual ancestry.'
7. Reflected in the rich and varied epithets Maximus bestows on him: 'great' (ὁ πολὺς) (PG 91: 1048A, 1052C); 'wise' (σοφός) (1056C); 'divine' (θεῖος) (1188A); 'godlike' (θεοεικελός) (1289A); 'godminded' (θεόφρων) (1213C; 1413D); 'divinely speaking/inspired' (θειγόροος) (1312D; 1313A; 1413A); 'God-revealing' (θεοφάντωρ) (1080B; 1260B; 1417B; cf. *Opusc.* 84D; *Opusc.* 96C; 100b); 'holy' (ἅγιος) (1056C; 1085A; 1213C; 1260B; 1285A; 1289A; 1312D; 1313A); 'great' (μέγας) (1048A; 1188A; 1188C; 1260B; 1285A; 1289A; 1312D; 1313A; 1413A; 1417B). Most of these adjectives qualify the title 'teacher' (διδάσκαλος) (1048A; 1049A; 1052A; 1054C; 1056B), usually in combination with some form of either 'Dionysius' or 'the Areopagite' (e.g., 1032B; 1080B; 1085A; 1188A; 1188C; 1213C; 1241A; 1260B; 1285A; 1289A; 1312D; 1313A; 1413D).
8. Pelikan, 'Introduction' (1985), 6.
9. Ibid., 9. One need not subscribe to Meyendorff's notion (as Pelikan seems to) that Maximus imposed a 'Christological corrective' on Dionysius, in order to recognize that Maximus greatly expanded the function and features of the incarnate Word in the framework of Dionysian cosmology, liturgy, and spirituality; cf. Meyendorff, 'Notes sur l'influence dionysienne' (1957).
10. Von Balthasar, 'Das Scholienwerk' (1940); and Suchla, *Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien* (1980); cf. Louth, 'St Denys the Areopagite' (1993): 166-67.
11. See, however, Loudovikos, *Eucharistic Ontology* (2010), which tacitly ascribes all the *scholia* to Maximus, and builds much of its argument on them.
12. Suchla, *Ioannis Scythopolitani* (2011).
13. Among other things, Maximus was aware that the reference to Ignatius of Antioch in *DN* 4.12 raised questions about the historicity of the *CD*, which of course he defended; cf. the two *scholia* in *ibid.*, 249-50.
14. Suchla, *Ioannis Scythopolitani* (2011) 417.
15. Ibid., 203; cf. 385-86.
16. Maximus's emphasis on Christology is consistent with John's support of the Council of Chalcedon, though Maximus does not engage in any anxious defense of Dionysius's orthodoxy; cf. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis* (1998), 72-82, who argue that John's 'dominating interest' is Christology.
17. E.g., *akron* (PG 4:33D-36B; 384B; 396B); *metron* (229B; 248D); *meson* (80B; 161A; 253B; 384B); *hexis* (33C; 75A; 205AB; 280C); *monas* (76D-77A; 193C; 385BC); *peras* (200D; 253B; 332D-333A); *topos* (76BC); the circle and its radii (73AD); the sun and its rays (240B; 328D-329A); rest and motion (333C); the cessation of intellectual activity (204C); the definition



- of motion (257D; 268B; 397B); the definition of evil (276AC; 277A; 284D; 292C); and the larger project of refuting Origen and Evagrius (172C-175B).
18. On this question, see Cvetković, 'Predeterminations and Providence' (2011).
  19. Cf. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Skythopolis* (1998), 87, who note that 'more than a dozen lengthy scholia treat the subject of pre-existent paradigms.'
  20. *DN* 1.4; 2.11; 4.1; 4.7; 5.5; 5.7; 7.4; and *MT* 3.
  21. *DOML* 1:107-109; note that *Amb.* 7 is Maximus's principal refutation of Origenism. For the *Responses*, see below, n. 25.
  22. 'Plato understood the ideas and paradigms in a lowly manner unworthy of God; Dionysius, on the other hand, used the same word, but explained its meaning in a pious manner, saying that the divine wills are defining and creative. They are 'creative' because it is by God's will alone that he brings all things into existence and creates them; and they are 'defining' because beings were created with differences and different forms. Note that what he calls 'paradigms' are the essence-creating *logoi* or 'predeterminations' of beings that pre-exist uniformly in God' (ed. Suchla, *Ioannis Scythopolitani* (2011), 341).
  23. For a list of 40 citations and allusions, see Sherwood, 'Denys l'Aréopagite' (1947), 296-297. Sherwood's list is incomplete and contains errors; by my count the total number of combined citations and allusions is closer to 80, though it is not always clear if Maximus is drawing directly on the *CD* or if both he and Dionysius are drawing on common patristic and/or philosophical sources.
  24. For the *Ambigua to John*, Sherwood, *Earlier Ambigua* (1955), 17, provides a list of 16 Dionysian citations and allusions, which is incomplete and contains some errors; my own count places the number closer to 40; cf. the citations indexed in Constas, *Ambigua* (2014), 2/384.
  25. See, for example, Intro. 1.2.8; and Questions 1.4; 8.2; 11.2; 13.2; 15.2; 15.5; 21.2; 25.5; 25.6; 28; 35.2; 44; 49.9; 51.3; 51.9; 51.18; 65.2; in Constas, *Thalassios* (2018).
  26. Constas, *Thalassios* (2018), 81-91; Maximus's essay 'On Evil' circulated independently of the *Responses*, and, in at least one instance, was included in a collection of works by Dionysius and Proclus; cf. CCSG 7, p. xi. For the *scholion*, see Suchla, *Ioannis Scythopolitani* (2011), 262.
  27. *QD* 142, 157, 173, and II,14 (CCSG 10:101, 109-110, 120, 167-68); trans. Prassas, *Questions and Doubts* (2010).
  28. I therefore disagree with Völker, 'Einfluss' (1960), 244, who saw in Maximus's writings only 'Areopagitical islands' stylistically and intellectually adrift in a *mare Maximianum*.
  29. Gregory Nazianzus, of course, is the exception to this rule, and Maximus's near systematic preference for Dionysius and Gregory, evident already in his *Chapters on Love* 1.100, suggests an intriguing convergence of the two in his thought.
  30. *Opusc.* 7 (PG 91:84D); *Opusc.* 8 (100B); *Opusc.* 9 (120A); *Opusc.* 28 (345C), all citing the 'one theandric energy' formula, or other terms from Dionysius, Letter 4; cf. *Opusc.* 8 (96C), citing *DN* 8.5; *Opusc.* 21 (248A), citing *DN* 9.2; and Maximus, Letter 13 (529C), citing *DN* 1.4.
  31. *DOML* 1:31-59. The notion of a 'theandric energy' was the most contested formula of the day, an altered version of which ('one theandric energy') was used to appeal to the Monophysites. Maximus provided the correct version ('a certain new theandric energy,' confirmed by all the manuscripts of the *CD*), along with an orthodox interpretation; cf. Bellini, 'Maxime interprète de Pseudo-Denys' (1982), 37-49.

32. Gersh, *Iamblichus* (1978), 6, sees Maximus as a key writer in the Christian transformation of Neoplatonic metaphysics.
33. See, for example, Gregory Nazianzus, *Or.* 29.2: 'We shall not venture to speak of an 'overflow of goodness,' as one of the Greek philosophers dared to say, as if it were a bowl overflowing, and this in plain words in his discourse on the First and Second Causes. We ought never to introduce the notion of involuntary generation as some sort of unrestrained natural secretion' (SC 250:180).
34. 'Flowing' or 'streaming' (ῥεῖν, ἀπορρεῖν) is the central metaphor for Neoplatonic emanation. In *Amb.* 7, Maximus was asked to explain Gregory Nazianzus's claim (in *Or.* 14.7) that human beings are a 'portion of God that has flowed down from above' (DOML 1:74-75).
35. This is the argument of *Amb.* 7; cf. Gersh, *Iamblichus* (1978), 221, who connects this new sense of 'remaining' with Maximus's anti-Origenist argument.
36. *Amb.* 7.2 (DOML 1:76); cf. Gersh, *Iamblichus* (1978), 219, n. 65: 'Maximus is attacking the Origenistic doctrine of the primal henad. However, the implications of this critique go even wider than this, for the elements in the Origenistic cosmology which Maximus is keen to refute are precisely those which also characterize traditional pagan Neoplatonism.'
37. Gersh, *Iamblichus* (1978), 219-20.
38. Powers = *DN* 2.7; 11.6; participations = *DN* 2.5; 2.7; 5.5; processions = *DN* 1.4; 2.4; 2.11; 5.1; 5.2; providences = *DN* 1.8; 5.2; manifestations = *DN* 2.4; activities = *CH* 13.3-4; 15.6; *DN* 9.9; distributions = *DN* 2.5; 2.11.
39. Cf. *DN* 5.2; 11.6. According to Gersh, *Iamblichus* (1978), 21, there is 'no evidence that pagan thinkers understood emanation as anything other than an automatic and unwilling process. Yet Dionysius retains most of the language and metaphors but without implying actual ontological emanation, or the idea of the divine being diffused out into gradations.'
40. *Amb.* 7.15 (DOML 1:95); cf. De Andia, 'Transfiguration et théologie négative' (1997), who posits a distinction between Maximus's essence/activities ontology, and Dionysius's ontology of *hyperousios/ousia*.
41. Cf. Golitzin, 'Dionysius Areopagites' (2002): 86, who considers the idea an 'illusion,' a 'scholarly invention,' and a 'scholarly phantom,' which he attributes to a reduction of Dionysius to Neoplatonism.
42. This process can already be seen in Maximus, *QD* 173 (CCSG 10:12), which demonstrates strong dependence on Dionysius, looks forward to the *Ambigua to John*, and shows that already at this early stage Maximus was fusing Dionysian metaphysics with Christology; see below, at n. 66.
43. Cf. *DN* 4.15; *CH* 9.2; and Chlup, *Proclus* (2012), 65.
44. Cf. *CH* 8.2; 15.1; 15.6.
45. And is thus an 'elevating and revertive power' (*CH* 15.5).
46. Cf. Chlup, *Proclus* (2012), 21-24; and the difficulties Dionysius had in explaining Isaiah's description of a seraph engaging in activities on a level not properly its own (*CH* 13.1-4); on which, see Ducow, 'Isaiah meets the Seraph' (1991).
47. The words 'hierarchy' and 'hierarch' are attested in the prologue and chap. 9 of the *Mystagogy* (CCSG 69:6, 38): the latter is a simple reference to a bishop, and the former occurs when Maximus cites the title of Dionysius's *EH*. For Maximus, the more flexible category of *thesis* effectively displaces the function of hierarchy; cf. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator* (1995), 63.
48. *Amb.* 7.12 (DOML 1:93).

49. *Amb.* 41.2 (DOML 2:103-105). Here Maximus is indebted not to Dionysius but to Gregory of Nyssa, and in a sense is rejecting the hierarchies of Proclus for the immediacy of Plotinus; cf. Chlup, *Proclus* (2012), 16-29; and Schroeder, *Form and Transformation* (1992), 45-56. Gavin, *Angelology and Anthropology* (2009), 102-103, states that, for Maximus, the 'ontological order of creation depends less on a hierarchical structure, and more upon the ordering of the *logoi* of divine providence and judgment united in the Logos. The structure of the cosmos emerges from the divine desire to become 'immanent' in the Incarnation, eliminating the need for the strict scalar chain of being.'
50. *Amb.* 20.5 (DOML 1:417); cf. Portaru, 'Gradual Participation' (2013), who argues persuasively for a 'transposition of Dionysian participation through hierarchy' into what he calls the 'territory of personal experience,' which is essentially a shift away from fixed ontological categories to the role of freedom in the divinization of rational creatures.
51. As noted by Gavin, *Angelology and Anthropology* (2009), 208-209. See also Maximus, *QD* 147, where the notion that Christ ascended through the nine orders of angels is understood as a symbol for the spiritual ascent of the Logos in the souls of those who keep the Ten Commandments (CCSG 10:101).
52. For discussion, see Gersh, *Iamblichus* (1978), 225-27.
53. On the impact of this new emphasis on history and language, see Constas, 'Greater and More Hidden Word' (2016).
54. Gersh, *Iamblichus* (1978), 243-45, notes that the Christian treatment of motion presents 'many points at which real innovations are made, especially in connection with Maximus's use of motion and rest,' and again that 'the fullest elaboration of [the theory of creaturely motion] occurs in Maximus' *Ambigua*,' and the 'whole theory seems to have resulted from Maximus' own reflections on a particular philosophical problem and goes back to no previous source.'
55. Maximus uses *epistrophe* only to describe moral and not ontological conversions to God; cf. *Chapters on Love* 1.13; *Mystagogy* 9; *Amb.* 10.26; 10.37; 10.66.
56. *Amb.* 7.20: 'The one Logos is many *logoi* and the many are One. According to the creative and sustaining procession of the One to individual beings, which is befitting of divine goodness, the One is many. According to the revertive, inductive, and providential return of the many to the One—as if to an all-powerful point of origin, or to the center of a circle pre-containing the beginnings of the radii originating from it—insofar as the One gathers everything together, the many are One' (DOML 1:100-103).
57. Cvetković, 'Procession and Conversion' (2015).
58. Dionysius does not use the word *anaphora*, but cf. *CH* 13.3 (46, lines 9-10).
59. Cvetković, 'Transformation,' 206.
60. *Antistrophe* was originally a grammatical-logical term, referring to the conversion or exchange of a subject for its predicate, which Maximus has given an ontological sense.
61. Cf. *Amb.* 10.9: 'For they say that God and man are paradigms of each other, so that as much as man, enabled by love, has divinized himself for God, to that same extent God is humanized for man by His love for mankind' (DOML 1:165).
62. *DN* 4.10; cf. De Andia, *Henosis* (1996), 141-142.
63. See, for example, *Amb.* 34.2: 'Negations and affirmations become amicably interwoven with each other around God, each entering into and reciprocally complementing the other ... to the extent that the negations and affirmations are taken in relation to each other, they express opposition through antithesis, but when they are referred to God, they

- reveal their intimate relation by the manner in which the two extremes mutually condition each other' (DOML 2:67)
64. *Amb.* 20 (DOML 1:409-19); this is yet another place where Maximus combines the thought of Gregory Nazianzus and Dionysius.
  65. *Amb.* 20.5: 'The positive affirmation of the knowledge of what is above is a negation of the knowledge of what is below, just as the negation of the knowledge of what is below implies the affirmation of what is above' (DOML 1:417); Maximus supports this argument with a citation from *CH* 2.3.
  66. *QD* 173 (CCSG 10:120).
  67. *Amb.* 10.28-34 (DOML 1:191-203). Maximus also comments on the Transfiguration in *QD* 191-92 (CCSG 10:132-35); and *Cap. theol.* 2.13-16 (PG 90:1129D-1132C). Note, too, the shift from the darkness of Sinai to the light of Thabor, which marks yet another move away from Dionysius.
  68. Dionysius, *Ep.* 3 (1069B; 159, lines 6-7).
  69. Here I am helped by Kattan, 'Christological Dimension' (2006).
  70. *Amb.* 10.32 (DOML 1:197-99).
  71. Maximus, *Diverse Chapters* 1-15, 1.8: 'The divine Logos is eternally made manifest in different modes of participation, and yet remains eternally invisible to all in virtue of the surpassing nature of his hidden activity' (PG 90:1181AB).
  72. Scholarship on the *Mystagogy* often includes minor comparisons with the *EH*. Some scholars mistakenly see the *Myst.* as a 'supplement' to the *EH*, but most have noted both continuity and differences between the two works. Bornert, *Commentaires byzantins* (1966), 83, argues that Maximus's commentary is 'both original and traditional: it contains some highly original and creative formulations, but at the same time is steeped in the prior patristic tradition.' Soteropoulos, *Μυσταγωγία* (1978), 55-77, mistakenly claims that the primary source for the *Myst.* is the *EH*, and provides a (useful) table of comparisons and parallel passages, but nonetheless concludes that the *Myst.* is 'entirely different' from the *EH* in terms of its form and content. See the more balanced study by Świtkiewicz-Blandzi, 'Ecclesiastical Hierarchy' (2000).
  73. The same (?) elder is invoked eight times in the *Ambigua*; cf. DOML 1:xix-xx. In the *Myst.*, the elder is to Maximus what Hierotheus was to Dionysius, and thus functions as a Dionysian 'hierarch' in the deeper sense of one who expresses noetic truths in sensible forms.
  74. Boudignon, 'Maxime le Confesseur' (2002), 318, n. 5, reports that a marginal note in an 11th-century manuscript mistakenly identifies the elder with Dionysius.
  75. *Myst.* Prologue (CCSG 69:4,9-14).
  76. *Ibid.* (CCSG 69:6,54-59); cf. Völker, 'Einfluss' (1961), 342, n.3, who states the obvious when he says that here: 'Maximus distanziert sich deutlich von Dionys.'
  77. Cf. Van Rossum, 'Dionysius and Maximus' (2017): 406: 'Maximus' eschatological understanding of the liturgy is to be seen as an implicit corrective of Dionysius' dualistic and Platonic concept of the liturgy, that is, the distinction between the intelligible divine world (together with the celestial hierarchy), and the ecclesiastical hierarchy on earth.'
  78. See the *scholion* on *EH* 3.2 (PG 4:137D)
  79. *Amb.* 21.15 (DOML 1:443). Tellingly, both Maximus and the *scholion* alter the quotation from Hebrews so that the word 'realities' (*pragmata*) is replaced by 'truth' (*aletheia*), that is, from 'shadow, images, realities,' to 'shadow, image, truth.'

80. *EH* 2.1.
81. Angels receive one form revelation, biblical writers imparted another, and hierarchs hand down the ritual forms of the liturgy (*EH* 1.4).
82. Set forth in *Amb.* 7.6-14 (DOML 1:81-95); and *Amb.* 15.5-7 (DOML 1:365-371).

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## CHAPTER 15

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# DIONYSIUS AND JOHN OF DAMASCUS

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MARK EDWARDS AND DIMITRIOS PALLIS

JOHN of Damascus is the last hinge between Eastern and Western Christianity, the last Greek to be regularly quoted by the scholastics and in modern eyes the first of whom we can say that he is not so much a Church Father as a compiler from other Fathers. Even if he had written only his treatise *On the Orthodox Faith*, this criticism would not do justice to the compactness of its architecture or to the trenchancy of its formulae, which boldly expose the antinomies of faith and the paradoxical interdependence of the great doctrines without pretending, as so many of his predecessors had done, to explain what cannot be explained. Few of those who strive for originality (a goal for which he had no word)<sup>1</sup> have influenced subsequent usage as profoundly as Damascene did when he transferred the noun *perichorêsis* from Christology to the doctrine of the Trinity;<sup>2</sup> and to this we can add the impact of one treatise seldom matched for its intellectual and political intrepidity, the *Defence of the Holy Images*. In this enterprise, as in his Christology and his Trinitarian doctrine, Damascene claims the authority of, and thus lends his authority to, the treatise *On the Divine Names*, while he also cites the *Celestial Hierarchy* in a lapidary chapter on the angels. It may be that his endorsement facilitated the adoption of Dionysius as an authority in both Byzantine and Latin scholasticism. On the other hand, as we shall see, his tentative and occasional use of the Dionysian corpus does not suggest that he regarded it with the unqualified reverence that he extends to such masters as Cyril and Gregory Nazianzen, whom he believed to be more remote in time from the Apostolic age.

Of the life of Damascene little need be said, as little is known with certainty.<sup>3</sup> He was born in Damascus, now no longer a Byzantine city but the Umayyad capital, in 675 or 676, and his family name, Manṣūr, is Semitic if not Arabic. Although he was to attack the Qur'an with knowledgeable zeal in one of the earliest Christian diatribes against Islam, it has not been determined whether he spoke Arabic, or whether he imitated his father and grandfather in acting as an official secretary to the caliph. Undoubtedly he was a Christian from his birth, and in circumstances that remain obscure he entered (or is

said to have entered) the monastery of Mar Saba near Jerusalem, perhaps as early as 706, and was ordained some thirty years later. Now a subject of the Byzantine Empire, he witnessed and opposed the campaign of Emperor Leo III against the use of icons, which may have been prompted by a desire to wrest back the ascendancy which God had transferred from the Christian world to the aniconic Muslims. John's rejoinder that to proscribe the image was to despise the incarnation was adopted by the victorious party at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, almost forty years after his death around 749. His sermons on the dormition of the Virgin Mary were also of great influence in establishing a doctrine which for John was once again a corollary of the incarnation. While he compiled a polemic against all heresies, the errors that most engaged him were always those regarding the person of Christ, which had grown more abundant as the disputes fomented by Chalcedon grew more abstruse. Since his principal adversaries, the Acephaloi, had co-opted the Areopagite in their defence on the first occasion when the Church learned of his existence, it will come as no surprise that almost all of John's citations from him have some reference to this controversy.

## SPEAKING OF GOD

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Since there would be no merit in believing if all that pertains to faith were knowable, the first article in Damascene's exposition of doctrine is the incomprehensibility of God. This axiom is amplified by a litany of privative terms—unoriginated, unending, uncreated, infinite, and a dozen more—which is matched by few, if any, of his predecessors, including Dionysius (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1.2.10–15, vol. I, pp. 8–9 Kotter). To these he adds superlatives—almighty, all-seeing, omnipotent—together with a handful of positive epithets (simple, just) and a rider that God is neither wholly known nor wholly unknown, neither wholly expressible nor wholly inexpressible (1.1.24–26, p. 8 Kotter). The existence of a deity is known to us by inference, for if all were uncreated it would be immutable and imperishable (1.3, p. 11 Kotter); creation, on the other hand, desiderates a Creator, unless we imagine that this everlasting harmony could arise by chance or inexorable fate. What we thus deduce from his causality, however, merely throws into relief the unlikeness of his nature to ours, and we can therefore say of him only that he exists, not what he is in essence. Damascene anticipates Maimonides in arguing that even the unity of God is demonstrated not by reason alone but also by revelation (1.4, pp. 12–13 Kotter). Since the same revelation shows that God creates by his word and spirit, we must conclude that these are distinct from him, yet as perfectly representative of his nature as our own discourse and action (when sincere) are representative of our thoughts (1.6–7, pp. 15–17 Kotter). Thus at Exodus 3.14 he reveals himself to Moses as He Who Is (1.9.12, p. 31 Kotter). Remembering that in Dionysius the first appellation of God is not being but goodness, he banishes the discrepancy with the argument that being and goodness are inseparable (1.12, pp. 35–36 Kotter). This is indeed an echo, if not a quotation, of a passage in which Dionysius sets himself apart

from his Greek preceptors by denying that there is an ontological gulf between goodness and being.<sup>4</sup> This conflation of the noetic with the supranoeitic—or, as some would say, of the first with the second antinomy of the *Parmenides*—defines him in his own time as a Christian among Platonists, and all the more so because the same passage maintains the inseparability of the Good from the noetic triad of being, life, and intelligence.<sup>5</sup> To this, however, Damascene is deaf or indifferent: living as he does in a world in which the principal enemies of his faith considered themselves the only true monotheists, his task is to reconcile an apparent conflict between authorities, not to decide whether one transcendent subject was more worthy than another of the divine superlatives.

From this absolute transcendence of God it follows that positive knowledge of the will of his purposes for his creatures can be elicited only from his own revelation. Yet since this can only be couched in terms intelligible to his creatures, it must always be read with the caveat that no image of God, not even when prompted by the Holy Spirit, manifests God as he is:

Since we find a great many statements in the divine scripture which symbolically represent God in a corporeal manner, it must be understood that, as human beings clothed in this gross flesh, we are unable to conceive or express the divine, exalted and immaterial energies of God except by images, types and symbols suited to our understanding. In fact, however, all that is said corporeally of God is symbolically phrased, but has a more exalted meaning; for the divine is both simple and without form<sup>6</sup> (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1.11.2–8, p. 33 Kotter).

Damascene goes on to decipher the anthropomorphic symbols of the Old Testament (1.11.8–38, pp. 33–34 Kotter). When we are told that the eyes of God see all, we understand that nothing can escape his knowledge; his mouth and speech signify the communication of his will, and his ears his accessibility to our prayers. Because prayers are accompanied by incense, he is also said to be moved by smell; by his countenance Scripture means the demonstration of his will through his works, by his hands the efficacy of his operations, and by his oaths the immutability of his will. His anger must be construed as his steadfast enmity to evil, his walking (and by metonymy his feet) as his condescension to our needs, and his sleep as the postponement of his judgement on the wicked or his assistance to the saints. To receive food and drink from him is to enjoy the satisfaction of our needs as a reward for our obedience, and to touch him is to have more precise knowledge of his hidden attributes. Touching and seeing are metaphors for the knowledge of the person, since even that spectral knowledge of the essence to which we attain by reason is not communicable to the senses:

In a word, then, whatever is said corporeally of God has some hidden meaning, communicating things above our condition through words that are suited to our condition, except for what is said about the sojourn of God the Word in corporeal form. For with the purpose of saving us he took upon himself all that is human, a rational soul and a body, and all that is proper to human nature, including those passions which are natural and free of blame (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1.11.38–43, p. 34 Kotter).

The antecedents to Damascene's exposition of sensory images in Scripture are to be sought perhaps in Origen (c. 185–c. 254) and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335/340–c. 395);<sup>7</sup> it is striking to note how rarely Dionysius attempts such glosses. God's providence is a function of his goodness, the first of his attributes, which is also represented as unstinting illumination; it is not, however, equated with God's vision, and his eyes are heaped together with the other bodily organs in a catalogue of anthropomorphic attributes that are not to be understood in a literal sense.<sup>8</sup> Dionysius says that they are elucidated in his *Symbolic Theology* (p. 121.2–3 Suchla; cf. also p. 193.2–9 Heil and Ritter), a work that many scholars think fictitious; the *Divine Names* seldom pauses to interpret such conceits except when God assumes bodily attributes that are no longer tropological.<sup>9</sup> In the *Mystical Theology* the lowlier predicates, such as anger and drunkenness, are said to be more common because they are better accommodated to vulgar ignorance,<sup>10</sup> but nothing is said to relieve this ignorance in the extant works. In short, the *Divine Names* offers us no more than the preamble to a lexicon whose compilation Dionysius entrusted to his readers, and he found no reader more diligent in this exercise than John.

Dionysius is not in fact cited anywhere in *On the Orthodox Faith* as a guide to scriptural hermeneutics, but rather as a classic exponent of the presupposition of this discipline, the ineffable sublimity of God. Even in this connection, it is not so much for his negative or apophatic theology as for his testimony to the causal supereminence of God that he proves most useful to Damascene:

As the divine Dionysius the Areopagite says, we have been taught in a mystery by the sacred oracles that God is the cause and origin of all, the being of beings, the life of the living, the reason of the rational, the intellect of intellectual beings. He is the recalling and resurrection of those who fall away from this, the renewal and transformation of those who are perishing by nature, the sacred anchor of those who are tossed on the sea of impiety and the security of those who are already standing, while for those who are ascending to him he is the road and the hand that will lead them (*anatatikê kheiragôgia*) to the higher place. And to this I shall add that he is the father of those things that he has made. For the God who draws out of nothing into existence is more truly our father than those who gave us birth, for they too have received from him both their existence and the power of generation (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1.12.1–12, p. 35 Kotter).

John goes on to style God the shepherd of the shepherded,<sup>11</sup> illumination of the illuminated, initiation of the initiated, divine origin of those who are being divinized, peace of the divided, simplicity of the simple, unity of the united, superessential origin of all, as being a superoriginal origin, and the bounteous gift of the hidden knowledge of himself, as is lawful and attainable for each. Paraphrasing or imitating the Dionysian idiom, he maintains that God is by nature incomprehensible and unnameable, since we cannot seek the name of an essence that exceeds our knowledge. While he is good, as is shown by his bringing us out of nothing and endowing us with knowledge in order that we may partake of his goodness, he has not vouchsafed the knowledge of his

essence, as it is impossible for a nature to have knowledge of the transcendent nature, the *hyperkeimene phusis*.<sup>12</sup> Knowledge is of beings; there is therefore no knowledge of the *hyperousion*, of that which is beyond being.<sup>13</sup> If we know him by our own figures of speech, that too is by his unspeakable condescension, for what he is in himself remains incomprehensible and without a name. He can be called by the names of the things that he has created because he is the cause of all and because (in the words of Maximus the Confessor) he contains the *logoi* or principles of all things.

What is said cataphatically, therefore, is predicated with respect to his causality. Because the incorporeal is more worthy of honour than the corporeal, and the pure more worthy of honour than the impure, so wisdom, reason, life, and power have a greater share in him than the objects of the sensible realm. Within this realm the sun has a greater share in him than darkness, and the three dynamic elements a greater share than earth. To say that good has a greater share than evil is simply to recognize that good is a substance and evil a privation of substance. Nevertheless, although supereminent terms such as 'superdivine' and 'superoriginal' are more true of him than any common predicates,<sup>14</sup> there are also cataphatic terms from common speech that can be employed with a supereminent force. For example we say—which means, of course, Dionysius says—that God is darkness, not because he wants light, but because he is higher even than light. Thus we arrive at the paradox that, when one of a pair of antonyms is more true of God than the other, it is the less true that conveys the higher truth (1.12.31–33, p. 36 Kotter).

## REDEEMING DIONYSIAN CHRISTOLOGY

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In his Christology Damascene recognizes two authorities, the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 and Cyril of Alexandria's 'one nature of the Word enfleshed,' which were often held to be incompatible. The Council of Chalcedon proclaimed one person in two natures, and John stood at the end of three further centuries of bilious controversy as to whether he had one will or wills, an energy or activity proper to each of his natures or one representing both. The orthodoxy of John's day, ratified by the Sixth Ecumenical Council and enforced from the throne upon those within the reach of Constantinople, maintained that there were two wills and two energies, acting in such perfect unison that no dissonance or conflict between the human and the divine is ever apparent in the gospel. Cyril's affirmation of one nature is explained in two ways in John's treatise *On the Orthodox Faith*. At first he appears to follow Cyril himself<sup>15</sup> in making the Word the proper agent of redemption, first by uniting our flesh to his nature and then by penetrating the flesh, as only an incorporeal power can do, to produce a *perichorêsis* or coinherence of the human and the divine.<sup>16</sup> In this view, the one nature is that of Word, who unites our flesh with God (that is, with himself) by making it his own flesh also, yet does not make it in the strictest sense his own nature, as our salvation demands that he retain his own nature as we retain ours (*On the Orthodox Faith* 3.7, pp. 122–126

Kotter). Since, on this theory, flesh is no less flesh when divinized, no proponent of this miaphysite formula admitted that it compromised Christ's humanity, but all held that Chalcedon's attribution of two natures to the same agent was at best absurd and at worst Nestorian. John, of course, is a Chalcedonian rather than a miaphysite, and his second device for reconciling the formulae, still fashionable today, is to hint that Cyril employed the term nature in two senses. On this view, he is saying that, while both natures are necessary to our salvation, we see them and therefore speak of them as one.<sup>17</sup> It is evident from John's treatise *On the Composite Nature of Christ against the Acephaloi* (vol. IV, pp. 409–417 Kotter)<sup>18</sup> that in his eyes the most pernicious of the Christological heresies after Chalcedon was the monoenergism of Severus of Antioch. Although the derisive term *acephaloi* implies that his followers lacked a patriarch, Severus was for a time the uncontested Bishop of Antioch, and after his death a saint in the eyes of many.<sup>19</sup> To John he was a monophysite, a believer in only one nature after the union, but he owes his special place among the paladins of Cyril to his argument that, even when the Word of God took flesh he exercised only one activity, simultaneously human and divine. In this he contradicted the Tome, or 128th letter of Leo of Rome, which had been canonized at Chalcedon.<sup>20</sup> Since one energy entails one will, Severus argued that to posit both a divine and a human will in Christ was to fall back into the heresy of two Christs or two sons, which had been refuted once and for all at the Council of Ephesus. Although it was widely held that this heresy had received its death-blow from Sophronius of Jerusalem, the taint of it clung to Sophronius' contemporaries Honorius of Rome and Sergius of Constantinople, while Maximus the Confessor and Honorius' successor Martin of Rome were cruelly handled by the emperor after the Lateran Council of 649 proclaimed that Christ had both a human will and a divine one.<sup>21</sup> The followers of Severus had reinforced their claim to orthodoxy by producing, for the first time in any debate between theologians, a testimony from the works of Dionysius.<sup>22</sup> To their contemporaries in 532 this was an appeal to an unknown author, and indeed to one whom they had little chance of knowing if, as we now believe, the Dionysian corpus appeared between the death of Proclus in 485 and the closure of the Platonic school in Athens in 529. In the time of Severus, too, its authenticity was contested, not only for want of previous attestation but on the plea that a companion of Paul would not teach heresy. For Damascene, however, as for most of his orthodox contemporaries, both its antiquity and its orthodoxy had been proved by John of Scythopolis. He had thus two reasons for citing it, though they coexist somewhat uneasily: to reinforce the consensus of the Fathers with a voice from the age of Paul and to forestall objections to orthodox Christology that might be derived by ignorance or malice from these venerable texts.

The first of his two citations from Dionysius in the third book *On the Orthodox Faith* is designed to show that all Christological error arises from failure to grasp the distinction between a person and a nature (3.12.10–13, p. 134 Kotter). The heresy of the Nestorians is to deny the unity of either nature or hypostasis, while that of Severus and the other monophysites<sup>23</sup> is to insist, against all sound reasoning, that if Christ is a single person or hypostasis, he can have but a single nature. Thus the antagonistic sects agree on one thing, their assumption of a numerical equality between nature and hypostasis in Christ.



Once we subscribe to this, however, the converse of denying two natures in the one hypostasis of the Saviour is to deny the presence of three hypostases in that single nature which is identical with God. We should then be obliged to infer from the dictum of Paul, 'in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' (Colossians 2.9), that Father and Spirit participated together with the Son in the incarnation. From this fallacy, says John, we are rescued by the teaching of Dionysius that the Godhead became incarnate in one of its hypostases.<sup>24</sup> Deftly winnowing what is true from what is false in the doctrine of the Antiochene school, John adds that the Father and Spirit dwell not hypostatically, but only by good pleasure or *eudokia*. This is a silent gloss on Matthew 3.17, 'This is my son, in whom I am well pleased', which Theodore of Mopsuestia had wrongly taken to mean that even the indwelling of the Word in the human Jesus was no more than a condescension of the will which fell short of a hypostatic union of the human and divine.<sup>25</sup>

As the author of a learned dissertation in the *Patrologia Graeca* intimates,<sup>26</sup> John has been prudently reticent in his citation of Dionysius. The passage from which he takes one sentence goes on to declare that by 'calling to himself and assuming the baseness of human nature the simple Jesus came into being as a composite, and the eternal underwent a distension in time'.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen, the notion of a single composite nature in Christ was an anti-Chalcedonian deduction from Cyril's motto, 'one nature of the Word enfleshed'. Once we concede the lateness and pseudonymity of the Dionysian corpus, we are free to suspect that the party of Severus had a hand in the creation of the authority that it invoked; John was bound at all times, of course, to give an orthodox reading to the saint,<sup>28</sup> and one that would demonstrate his intimacy with Paul. By coupling master and pupil here, without hinting that the latter had used any words that required apology, John cements his orthodoxy and thus prepares us for his defence of another passage from the Dionysian corpus which had undoubtedly been pressed into service by the 'monophysites':

The blessed Dionysius, when he says that Christ exercised among us a certain new theandric energy, does not do away with the natural energies, but means that a new energy came into being from both the divine and the human (*On the Orthodox Faith* 3.19.1–3, p. 160 Kotter).

At the end of his letter to the fictitious Gaius, where he coins the term *theandrikê* (or perhaps adapts it from Origen),<sup>29</sup> Dionysius asseverates that Christ assumed supernaturally that which belongs to our nature and superessentially that which is of the essence. According to Anastasius Sinaita, texts of this kind in the Dionysian corpus were adduced by the monoenergists to prove that, despite the Word's assumption of human nature, he never performed an activity in a merely human manner; thus the leading principle of monoenergism could be stated even without the clear affirmation of a single theandric energy, which was rather the crown than the cornerstone of the case advanced by Severus. John, for his part, assumes that if he can make the crown his own he has won the field, and therefore thinks it enough to construe the term 'theandric' as he has already construed the Cyrilline *mia phusis*: in his definition *energeia theandrikê*



signifies not a single energy exercised by two natures but the miraculous resultant of two energies, each exercised by its own nature, but in such consummate harmony that they were indistinguishable to the observer. Thus the theandric energy unites the natural energies as the person unites the natures, the union bearing witness on closer inspection to the duality, as only the complete irradiation of the human by the divine could have fashioned such an unblemished instrument of God's will.

Here there is all the more need of other authorities to predispose us to the orthodox reading of the notoriously equivocal Dionysius. On the one hand, he avers, in language echoing the fourth letter, that no bifurcation of the works of Christ is admissible, even the human works having been accomplished in a superhuman manner; on the other hand, his canons of sound Christology in chapters 15 to 18 are drawn from writers of the fourth century, all saints and all adversaries of Apollinarius, the putative father of monophysitism. Foremost among them is Gregory Nazianzen, who declares in his oration on the spirit that to exert an *energeia* is not to be acted upon but to act;<sup>30</sup> next comes an unambiguous assertion of the two natures from the letter to Cledonius against Apollinarius;<sup>31</sup> and immediately after a distinction between the one who deifies and the one who is deified clearly indicates that the energy of God is the reciprocal of the energy of man.<sup>32</sup> Dionysius may be *theologikôtatos* for John, but it was Gregory who was singled out from every other Gregory, and from all the Fathers after the biblical age, by the appellation *theologos* (2.3.66 and 75, p. 48 Kotter).<sup>33</sup>

Damascene will not have known that the 'Father' to whom he assigned the aphorism that one *energeia* entails one *ousia* was in fact Apollinarius;<sup>34</sup> this misplaced honour does not impair his reasoning, which could have been based just as readily on Gregory of Nyssa's tenet<sup>35</sup> that one *energeia* entails one power. Once it has been established, with Chalcedon and against Apollinarius, that Christ possessed two natures (and hence, by Cappadocian reasoning, two powers), his own maxim shows that both a divine and a human *energeia* were necessary for our salvation. Damascene completes his appropriation of Dionysius for the orthodox case by quoting almost word for word the precarious dictum of Leo's *Tome* that each of the natures does its own work in conjunction with the other.<sup>36</sup> Cyril and his supporters would have cavilled, but for John it is an axiom that those whom the Church has recognized as Fathers must agree.<sup>37</sup>

## THE ANGELIC HIERARCHY

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Nazianzen once again corroborates and amplifies the teaching of Dionysius in a brief section on the angels (*On the Orthodox Faith* 2.3, pp. 45–48 Kotter), whom John declares to be rational and created beings, and hence by nature capable of evil, albeit not so easily moved to it as we are (2.3.58, p. 47 Kotter). Those that have not yet fallen are now immovable by the grace of God, which imparts to them a constancy in adherence that do not possess by nature (2.3.59). They contemplate God, and are nourished by that contemplation according to their capacities (2.3.59–60). Though incorporeal in relation to

us (2.3.11–12, p. 45 Kotter), they are not exempt from every kind of passion, since (as John says elsewhere) there are passions that have their origin in the soul and intellect (2.3.60–62, p. 47 Kotter). Their seat is in the heavens, where their one task is to celebrate their Creator in obedience to his will. As messengers of God they take whatever shape he ordains to impart his commands and revelations in a manner commensurate with our understanding (2.3.62–64, p. 47 Kotter). So far John has invoked no authority, but he now says, on the authority of the ‘most holy, the most sacred and indeed the most theological Dionysius’ that there are nine orders of angels, divided into three triads, the first of which stands in the immediate presence of God.<sup>38</sup> He adds that Scripture corroborates the teaching of the saint, but does not say whether it furnished him with the taxonomy or only with the names of the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones whom he allotted to the first triad, the dominions, virtues, and powers whom he allotted to the second, and the principalities, archangels, and angels whom he allotted to the third. John adds—once again on the authority of Gregory Nazianzen<sup>39</sup>—that the angels were the first created beings, although he concedes that there are others who make them posterior to the first heaven, which he assumes, with many early theologians of the East and the West, to be incorporeal. At any rate, he argues with a further appeal to Gregory, it is fitting that the creation of the intelligible should precede that of the sensible, and we may therefore be sure that the angels came into being before humanity, which partakes of both these natures.

Damascene does not confirm the reasoning of Gregory Nazianzen from the scriptures. By contrast, the superlatives that he heaps upon Dionysius suggest that he feels the need to vindicate an authority which at best is supplementary to that of both revelation and the fathers of Christian dogma. John himself, however, was to become a greater, or at least more familiar, authority in the West than any of his Greek predecessors, and, while he himself will never have perused any work by Gregory the Great, it may have been his example that persuaded Thomas Aquinas to prefer the Dionysian order of angels to that of a pope and doctor of the Latin Church.<sup>40</sup>

## IMAGING THE DIVINE

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John returns to the Areopagite in his most innovative treatise, the *Defence of the Holy Images*,<sup>41</sup> through which he builds a case for the veneration of icons in defiance of the arguments which had been drawn by Jews and Muslims from the Decalogue, and by Christians (including recent emperors) from the silence of the Fathers and apostles.<sup>42</sup> Dionysius, notwithstanding his reverence for the sacraments and their ministers, was no more willing than any of his Christian predecessors to admit that the image of God could be found outside the human soul. He borrows from Plotinus the notion of fashioning one’s own soul as a living statue,<sup>43</sup> but he does not import from Porphyry, Iamblichus, or Proclus any notion of the image as a locus of divine power or as an instrument of symbolic representation.<sup>44</sup> Parallels can be drawn, nonetheless, between

Neoplatonic essays on sacred heraldry and his own recipes for the decipherment of anthropomorphic imagery in the scriptures; since he accomplished this without giving credence to the allegorical reading of pagan myths, he could serve as a model for John when he distinguishes the icons of faith from the idols of the nations. For John and Dionysius alike the incarnation guaranteed the presence of the divine in the material, and the passage from the *Divine Names* that informs our reading of figurative expressions in the scriptures is equally cogent in a new context as a lesson in the edifying use of the visual figure. Idolatry is precluded in both cases by the *anagoge* and *anatatikon*, the leading of the soul to a higher place, which Christ effects first by his assumption of our flesh, and then by his constant repetition of this miracle when he meets us in the types and symbols of the prophetic word.<sup>45</sup>

The fourth species of painting, which fashions figures, shapes and mouldings of the invisible and incorporeal, corporeally moulded into an indistinct representation of God or the angels, is on account of our not being to behold the incorporeal without figures commensurate with us, as Dionysius the Areopagite says,<sup>46</sup> a man steeped in things divine.<sup>47</sup> The one reason, one might say, why it is in order to produce mouldings of things unmoulded,<sup>48</sup> and figures of things without shape, is the analogical character of our understanding, which cannot behold the intelligible without an intermediary, and needs aids in its ascent which are proper to it and of like nature (*On Images* 3.21.1–12).

John completes his case with an *a fortiori*: if it is legitimate to represent the invisible, how much more legitimate it must be to represent that which is already made visible in the incarnation. This reasoning is foreign to Dionysius, as to his Christian predecessors, none of whom expressly defends the use of icons. It is partially limned in Origen's analogy between the incarnation and the text of Scripture, in which Christ 'as it were, becomes flesh' in order to draw the mind by degrees to a higher level of insight, which stands to the somatic or historic sense of the scriptures as the Godhead of Jesus stands to his humanity.<sup>49</sup> But Origen thinks an icon little better than an idol,<sup>50</sup> and it is Damascene who initiates a new understanding of literature and art as two different forms of disclosure, associated with two different modes of divine occultation.<sup>51</sup> The language of negation and the language of supereminence converge insofar as both acknowledge the inscrutability of the Godhead: one, however, suggests that his hiddenness is intrinsic to him, the other that it is the consequence of our own infirmity. Where the first presents us with an image of impenetrable darkness, the second intimates that he is not so much too dark to be seen as too brilliant for us to sustain the vision of him, just as it is the plenitude, not the absence, of light that renders us incapable of contemplating the sun. The cataphatic diction of the scriptures—the types and symbols, as John calls them here—are divinely appointed means of rendering visible that which is naturally invisible, of tempering the hiddenness of God's essence. The incarnation, by contrast, is God's own hiding of the essence, a veiling of his supereminent properties which makes him for the first time an object of hearing, sight, and touch.<sup>52</sup> God's essential hiddenness and the hiding of his

divinity in Jesus are the *recto et verso* of his transcendent goodness, corresponding to the apophatic and cataphatic modes in the Dionysian anatomy of language. The icon is the replication of divine cataphasis, whereas the imagery of Scripture (exhaustively analysed by Damascene, as we saw earlier) is a provisional substitute for that which is properly known by apophasis, the way of unknowing. And so the Byzantine theologian stands on its head the argument of his Fathers that we ought not to make pictures of God because the two forms of linguistic accommodation by which he is known leave no impression but in the soul, and therefore furnish no charter for any image of him but the cultivation of inward beauty, holiness, and truth.

## CONCLUSION

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In conclusion, then, it is not where we find the name Dionysius that we find John Damascene at his most Dionysian. On the rare occasions when he refers explicitly to the Areopagite, it may be to acquit him of an apparent heterodoxy or to give cosmetic authority to an innovative teaching that cannot be proved from any of the Fathers. Dionysius gives his sanction to the uncontentious doctrine that the texts in Scripture which credit God with human properties must be read symbolically; on the other hand, the most celebrated thesis of the *Divine Names*, that we describe God best by admitting no description of him, is elaborated by Damascene at some length without any allusion to this first disciple of Paul's unknown God. When he adopts the Dionysian ordering of the angels, we do not know whether he thought of this as a matter in dispute; where there certainly is contention, he reproduces, almost word for word, the assertion that the human works of Jesus were superhumanly performed. Here, however, he cannot name his source, for even if he himself entertained no doubt of its authenticity, he was conscious that the fourth letter was the first text from the Dionysian corpus that had ever been cited in public, and that even in his own day it was the shibboleth of a heresy which he had strenuously opposed.

## NOTES

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1. See *Dialectica*, Preface and 2.9 (vol. I, pp. 53 and 55 Kotter); for a similar expression, see Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 3.3, p. 143.3–8 Suchla.
2. See *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.8.263 (vol. II, p. 29 Kotter) with Prestige 1928.
3. For summary and discussion, see Louth 2002: 3–6; for a different account, see Griffiths 2016: 32–36.
4. *Divine Names* 4.4, p. 148.12–18 Suchla.
5. In this passage in fact, perception. See further Schäfer 2006: 88–89; Rorem 1993: 167.
6. For *askhêmatistos*, cf. *Divine Names* 1.1, p. 109.9 Suchla.
7. See Cortesi 2000: esp. 177–179.
8. *Divine Names* 1.8, pp. 120.9–121.3 Suchla.

9. E.g. the feet of Christ as he walks on water: *Divine Names* 2.9, p. 133.10–11 Suchla.
10. *Mystical Theology* 3 (pp. 146.11–147.3 Heil and Ritter). Cf. also *Epistle* 9.1 (195.2–196.2). At *Divine Names* 4.20 (p. 167.6–10 Suchla) anger partakes of the good insofar as it undertakes to remedy an evil, and at 4.25 it cannot be expelled from the lion without depriving him of his leonine nature (173.3).
11. Cf. *Orthodox Faith* 1.9.29, p. 32 Kotter. In general he is following *Divine Names* 1.3, pp. 111.12–112.6 Suchla; the image of the shepherd, however, seems to be his own interpolation. For peace, see 4.21 and 11.1 (pp. 168–169 and 217–218 Suchla).
12. See e.g. *Divine Names* 1.1 (pp. 108.9; 109.11 and 13 Suchla), 1.2 (110.2), 2.3 (125.15), and 2.10 (135.5).
13. Here evoking not Dionysius but Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 3.6.76. We find *para phusin* and *hyperphuôs* at *Divine Names* 2.9, p. 133.9 and 14 Suchla, on which see further Shaw 1999: at 597, n. 99.
14. See *Orthodox Faith* 1.8.15 for *hypertheos* and 1.8.14 for *hyperousion*, p. 18 Kotter. Cf. *Divine Names* 1.5, p. 117.1 Suchla; *Divine Names* 1.3, p. 112.3 Suchla.
15. See Edwards 2015.
16. See further Cross 2000; Twombly 2015: 42.
17. *On the Orthodox Faith* 3.11, pp. 131–133 Kotter. Zachhuber 2020: 128 speaks of a search for ‘a placeholder of *phusis* at the level of the individual’.
18. Although John rejects the adjective *sunthetos* here he appears to endorse it at *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.2.27, p. 9 Kotter.
19. See translated materials in Torrance 1988; Brock and Fitzgerald 2013.
20. See especially *Tome of Leo* 3–4 at Bindley 1899: 198–200.
21. Allen 2009; Price 2014; Booth 2014: 186–224 and 278–328.
22. Allen and Hayward 2004: 136–137.
23. Here, as elsewhere, the label ‘monophysite’ is used when echoing the pejorative use of that term by John himself. ‘Miaphysite’ is used, with no implied censure, for anyone who adhered to the Cyrilline formula ‘one nature of the divine Word enfleshed’.
24. *Divine Names* 1.4, p. 113.7 Suchla.
25. See Theodore of Mopsuestia, p. 239 Jansen.
26. Possibly M. Le Quien, general editor of PG 94. *Dissertationes Damascenae* II.15, PG 94, cols. 287–294.
27. *Divine Names* 1.4, p. 113.8–10. Cf. ‘superessential Jesus’ at *Mystical Theology* 3.1, which, in conjunction with *Divine Names* 2.7 and 9, is understood by Rolt 1920: 25 to mean that the pre-existent soul of Christ is the head of both the visible and the supernal creation.
28. We should remember that it was not the orthodoxy of Dionysius himself that was questioned when the text was first produced in debate, but the legitimacy of the ‘monophysite’ reading. This was also the position of Damascene.
29. Cf. *deus homo* at *First Principles* 2.6.3, vol. V, p. 142.13 Koetschau. For the name or epithet Theandrites, see Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 19, p. 16 Boissonade and Wytttenbach; for Theandriton/Theondriton as a name for this deity’s shrine, see Trombley 1993: 328.
30. *Orthodox Faith* 3.15.15–16, p. 145 Kotter, citing *Oration* 31.
31. *Ibid.* 3.16.56–57, p. 155, citing *Epistle* 101.
32. *Ibid.* 3.17.5–6, p. 155 Kotter, citing *Oration* 38.45.
33. Damascene refers to a dictum of Gregory and calls it *theologikôtaton* (in superlative form) too at *Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary* 4.26, vol. V, p. 173 Kotter.
34. Fr. 113 Lietzmann, quoted at 3.19.6, p. 161 Kotter.

35. *On the Lord's Prayer* 3, quoted at 3.15.67–68, p. 147 Kotter.
36. *Tome of Leo* 146–148, p. 199 Bindley: 'Agit enim utraque forma cum alterius communione quod proprium est; Verbo scilicet operante quod Verbi est, et carne exsequente quod carnis est'. Note even here the subordination of the flesh to the Word, characteristic both of Cyril and of the authorities quoted by Damascene.
37. See the observations of Zachhuber 2020: 8 on the 'limited impact' of Dionysius on Byzantine Christology.
38. *Orthodox Faith* 2.3.66–67, p. 48 Kotter, citing *Celestial Hierarchy* 6.2.11–24, pp. 26–27 Heil and Ritter.
39. *Ibid.* 2.3.79–81, quoting *Oration* 38.45.
40. Aquinas does not quote Damascene on the order of the angels, but on their corporeality (*Summa* I.50, art. 1 and 5), locomotion (I.52, art. 2), and primordially (I.61, art. 3), and follows him e.g. at I.62, art. 8, on the impeccability of beatified angels.
41. For commentary and translation, see Louth 2003. It may be noted that in the florilegia that John attached to his treatises on images Dionysius is constantly the first patristic authority invoked because of his apostolicity. On these references, see John of Damascus, vol. III, pp. 144–145 Kotter.
42. Muslim and Christian influences are balanced by Pallis 2017: 179–182.
43. *Enneads* 1.6.9, adapting Plato, *Phaedrus* 252d–e; cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses* 2.313.
44. See further Addey 2014: 32, 64, and 252–255.
45. John of Damascus, vol. III, p. 128 Kotter; cf. also *On Images* 1.11.1–10, pp. 84–85 Kotter.
46. Kotter cites *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.12.8–11, p. 92 Heil and Ritter.
47. An expression found also in *Divine Names* 2.11, pp. 136.18–137.1 Suchla, where Dionysius used the Greek term *polus* ('much', but here translated 'steeped') with a pun on the name of Paul. Cf. also *On Images* 1.10.7, p. 84 Kotter.
48. Cf. *Divine Names* 1.1, p. 109.8 Suchla. The Greek is *tupos*, rendered elsewhere in this essay as 'type'.
49. See e.g. *Against Celsus* 4.15, with Edwards 2013: 101–103.
50. Edwards 2013: 112–113, citing *Homilies on Exodus* 8.3.
51. On the hostile reception of his work in some Christian circles after his death, see Adrahtas 2015: 265–267.
52. For discussion, see Payton 1996: 179–182; on the position of his predecessor, see Pallis 2020: 653–654.

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## CHAPTER 16

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# THEODORE THE STUDITE AND DIONYSIUS

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GEORGE ARABATZIS

THEODORE the Studite was born in Constantinople, possibly in 759<sup>1</sup>. His father Photeinos was an imperial customs tax collector and his mother was Theoktiste, a woman of tender character, about whom Theodore writes in a tone of filial affection in an epitaph composed by himself. He was taught grammar, poetry, and rhetoric and he committed himself to the study of philosophy and theology. Education, at the time, was the same for both the iconoclast and the iconophile Byzantines, i.e. a clearly literary education with some notions of Aristotelian logic, depending mainly on private tutors. Theodore's maternal uncle Platon was the *Hegoumenos* abbot of the monastery of Sakkoudion. He played an important role in Theodore's decision to enter monastic life just like the other children of the family. The details of the matter are given by Theodore in his epitaph for his uncle Platon. In 787 he was ordained a priest, in 797 he succeeded his still-living uncle as abbot of the monastery of Sakkoudion, and in 798 he was transferred together with his monks into the monastery of Stoudios. He also began his activity as a leading figure of the monastic party that, during the iconoclastic quarrel, would gain political power, struggling to play a role in the ecclesiastical policy of the government. His courageous interference in political affairs led him into exile three times. The particularly harsh treatment of Theodore is due partly to his crude polemics against the emperor and also to the fact that he contacted the pope of Rome, Paschal I, (see van de Vorst 1913) with the purpose of turning him against the iconoclasts of Constantinople. When Michael II came to power in 820, Theodore returned from his exile but the new emperor's attitude towards the holy icons was ambiguous. Theodore left Constantinople once again, of his own will and remained away from his home city until his death near Nikomedia on 11 November, 826, without having had the opportunity to enjoy the restoration of the icons on 11 March, 843. In 844, his successor, Saint Naukratios the Studite brought his relics back to Constantinople.

His writings include two collections of catechism that his biographer Michael had already named the Grand and the Small Catechism. The latter contains 134 admonitory

chapters addressed to the monks with regard to their duties. The style is elevated, enthusiastic, or simply encouraging while the source of his asceticism is Saint Basil rather than Dionysius the Areopagite. In the Great Catechism, there are 77 chapters, better structured in this second collection. Both collections were very popular if one judges from the number of their manuscripts. The ecclesiastic orations by Theodore were collected in a volume and it seems that these were discourses read on various occasions, mainly during Church celebrations. Among the discourses that survive, there is the epitaph for his mother Theoktiste and the epitaph for his uncle Platon. Other treatises by him are a report on the state of the Stoudios monastery, which is important as a source of information about monastic life and his Testimony, which is also of ascetic content and was read on the day of the celebration of his memory. He also wrote three treatises against the iconoclasts, which are of great theological and philosophical interest (*The Three Antirrhethikoi*/Τρεῖς Ἀντιρρητικοί). A strong expression of his iconophile faith is to be found in his over 500 letters and since he rarely refers to other theological questions, this shows how much he was absorbed in the struggle for the restoration of the holy icons.

Beyond the iconophile partisan politics of the Stoudios' monks, their cultural mission was also very important. Inspired by his own curriculum, Theodore the Studite made a plan for the education of his monks that included grammar, in order for them to read and write properly; some knowledge of philosophy, so that they could make rational arguments to defeat the heretics; chanting; and Church poetry. Theodore himself was an accomplished calligrapher and when in his letters he writes about the conditions of his detention in exile, he complains about the authorities having confiscated his books. The *Typikon* (Foundation document) of the monastery of Stoudios refers in its eight articles to the calligraphic workshop of the establishment and includes punishments for the mishandling the manuscripts, changing the meaning of the texts, stealing of books, etc. There was a special library in the basement of the monastery and a monk in charge of it. A special bell sounded the time to borrow a book and the time to return it to the library. Not delivering the book or partially destroying it entailed a punishment. According to a hypothesis, the minuscule lettered writing was conceived and practised for the first time in the monastery of the Stoudios (on Theodore the Studite, see Brubaker 2012, 68–82; Pratsch 1998; Cholij 2002; Damian 2002; Tollefsen 2018).

## DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, THEODORE THE STUDITE AND THE ICONOLOGICAL PROBLEM

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As a Byzantine intellectual Theodore the Studite was marked by his polemic against: the iconoclasts, since he was an iconophile and one of the master thinkers of the iconophile theory; the emperor, since he was a strong defender of the autonomy of the Church

against the state and the crown; and the ecclesiastical authority of Patriarch Nicephorus, although the latter was also an important thinker and supporter of the iconophile party. In what follows, the relation of Theodore to Dionysius the Areopagite will be viewed in regard to the Byzantine context.

The word 'image' is not unknown to the Areopagitic corpus, neither the allusions to the art of painting. Yet, the Dionysian employment of the term 'image' is not the same as that of the iconophiles who refer to it more extensively. Dionysius explores two types of images: the first is purely intelligible; the second is of educative value and has to do with symbolism that is alien to the figurative mimesis. The fidelity of the symbol is found in its unresembling character as to the divine object symbolized. The value of the symbol consists in the ascendance to the divine and is obtained through dissembling resemblance. The liturgy is what corresponds best to this idea of symbolic ascendance to the divine.

Dionysius acknowledges two kinds of symbols, the scriptural and the liturgical ones with a complex function. He does not seem to move beyond verbal images and evades the question of material representation. The scriptural symbol is also marked by a strange dissemblance in regard to the symbolized reality. The liturgical symbols that are more positive have a function of veiling what they supposedly disclose; they veil in order to hide the truth from the inferior hierarchies. A similar conception is at odds with the idea of the iconophiles about the figurative images of the holy, which are accessible to everyone (see Des Places 1981; Gouillard 1977–1978).

Yet, beyond the symbolic esotericism, there is a plethora of Dionysian notions and themes that could be extremely useful to an iconophile apologist. Thus, Theodore the Studite writes concerning the icons: 'we speak of relation inasmuch as the copy is in the prototype; one is not separated from the other because of this, except by the difference of essence' (*Third Antirrhetikos*, PG, 99, 424 D, trans. C. P. Roth, 1981, 106). The notion of the 'copy in the prototype' goes back to John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei*, 206, 8–10. This in turn is borrowed from Dionysius Areopagita: 'The truth in the likeness, the archetype in the image, the one in the other, except for the difference of essence' (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, henceforth EH, 4, 3; PG, 3, 473 C) (see Barber 2007, 141). All these convey a remarkable continuity as to the iconophile thinking, which to some extent is part of a recovery of the past.

Thus, establishing a direct relationship between iconophile thinking, which is present in Theodore's work, and Dionysius is not undemanding. As to the context, one must probably begin with Hypatius of Ephesus. Hypatius, metropolite of Ephesus (*d.* between 536/7 and 552) is the author of a work entitled *Symmikta zetemata* (Σύμμικτα Ζητήματα), a kind of theological florilegium of which only a fragment has survived. Here, Hypatius differentiates between the divine essence and the possibility of any conceptual or visual expression but allows for a degree of 'holy letters' to celebrate God. The term of 'sacred or holy letters' (*hiera grammata*/ἱερὰ γράμματα) referring to the Bible is also used by Theodore the Studite. It is possible that Hypatius had in mind the abundance of the word *hieros* (ἱερός) in Dionysius, his master thinker. In any case, he seems to oppose the book to the image as the iconoclast authors did. It is the book as *graphe* (γραφή) alone and not the figurative art that can represent God, whereas for the

iconophiles writing and painting were of the same value as to the expression of the holy (see Arabatzis 2013). Theodore the Studite refuted Hypatius' work in a letter to a certain Niketas. This last had warned Theodore against a work that contained unfitting arguments about images. From the context, it seems that Theodore possessed the full book of Hypatius and happily, the passage that Theodore selects as the object of his harsh criticism is precisely the surviving fragment of Hypatius.

The fragment by Hypatius also posits the question of the three-dimensional representations of the divine, i.e. the sculptures of the saints and the divinity. Hypatius uses the term *diaplattesthai* (διαπλάττεσθαι) that Dionysius employs for the anthropomorphic representations or visions (see PG 3, 137 A, 328 C, 329 C, 300 C). In any case, for Hypatius, any representation is lacking in comparison to the Scripture. Ernst Kitzinger has observed that Hypatius introduced a Dionysian terminology in the treated subject; Jean Gouillard in his analysis of Hypatius' fragment takes some distance from this interpretation. According to Gouillard, there is in Hypatius an effort to compromise between the adoration of icons and their denunciation.

What is of question here is the relation of the symbols to the divine condescendence manifested in the Bible, the adaptation of this latter to the capacities of the perceiving subject, the capacity of the symbols to elevate one towards the divine, from the sensible to the intelligible, through the intermediate hierarchies and according to initiation<sup>2</sup>. All these are found in Hypatius in a secondary manner, in a spirit of fidelity to terminology rather than to ideas. Kitzinger has shown a resemblance between Hypatius and EH I, 3 and Gouillard has noted others similarities as well. Gouillard goes so far as to imply that any influence of Dionysius on the iconophiles was made possible through the intermediary of the ambiguous position of Hypatius. This hypothesis is even more surprising since Hypatius belongs to those who doubt the antiquity of the author of the Dionysian writings. Hypatius would thus be an admirer of Dionysius as much as a critical spirit of him. In view of the above, Theodore's refutation of Hypatius shows that, most probably, he was aware of the ambiguous character of the Dionysian text regarding the images of the holy (all the relevant information about Hypatius in Gouillard 1961).

Paul Magdalino supports the idea of a direct relationship between the iconoclastic thinking and the scientific thought (see Magdalino 2006, 70–82), more precisely the cosmological tendency of Byzantine theology as one witnesses it in George of Pisidia (seventh century) and Maximus the Confessor (sixth–seventh century). The anthropomorphism was, on the other side, what characterized iconophile thinking. One finds the idea of the cosmos as the image of God neither in the iconoclast literature nor in the iconophile one and the truth is that the quarrel never surpassed the limits of Christology. It is also a fact that the *ikonodouloi*, the iconoclasts, have never disallowed the representation in terms of plants and birds. This shows, according to Magdalino, that the iconoclasts may have accepted the sanctity of natural things as indirect and symbolic images of the divinity. The iconophiles, on the other hand, after the restoration of the icons rather avoided the representation of non-human beings. It is then the iconoclasts who have preserved the cosmological dimension of the Paleochristian art. One witnesses this distinction on the limits of Byzantine *epistēmae* in scholars such

as John the Grammarian or Leo the Mathematician during the ninth century. If these two showed a preference for the sciences of mathematical inspiration, other scholars such as Patriarch Photius (ninth century), Arethas (ninth-tenth century), or Patriarch Nicephorus (eighth-ninth century) demonstrated a clear preference for the questions and topics of 'humanist' content or of philological inspiration. The mathematical scholars were thus criticized for their Neoplatonic tendency while the new intellectual ideals had a rather restrictive ethical perspective.

For Magdalino, these iconophile accusations are right in general although they were wrong in ascribing to the Byzantine cosmologists the Neoplatonism of Porphyry or Proclus since their cosmology was closer to the Christian Neoplatonism of Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. Dionysius was a thinker who, for Magdalino, could serve both the iconoclasts and the iconophiles. According to the apocrypha, he converted to Christianity because of, and not in spite of, his scientific knowledge. For the iconophiles, Dionysius can provide the theoretical argument about the icon as an intermediary in the ascendance towards God. To the iconoclasts, the work of Dionysius gave the idea of sacred symbolism provided to the humans who are dissimilar to God.

Magdalino uses a text by Leo Choirosphaktes—entitled *Theology in one thousand verses* (*Chiliostichos Theologia*)—to show the proximity of the iconoclast party to the Dionysian philosophy. As to the context of this work, it refers to the year 870 when intellectual life was dominated by Patriarch Photius. The emperor Leo VI turned against Photius and stood for a partial return to the ideology of the iconoclast emperors. Leo VI aspired to be not only emperor and priest but also a philosopher. He was named *Sophos*, the sage, and for Magdalino, this *sophia* also included the occult sciences. Thus, two tendencies were present in the Constantinopolitan court, one represented by Arethas of Caesarea, the 'humanist' in the sense of Photius, and another for which Leo Choirosphaktes stood. Leo composed letters and poems while the *Theologia in one thousand verses* is written in the manner of Gregory Nazianzenus and contains a short prologue and forty chapters in four sections on the following subjects: the nature of the One; against the heretics about the primary cause of the universe; the manifestation of the Creator in the Creation; and the unity of the Trinity. The work seems quite trivial in its content. Yet, as Magdalino points out, it lacks the usual reference to the person of the Christ, which is a crucial reference for the iconophiles since iconophilia is primarily related to Christology<sup>3</sup>. Instead of the theology of salvation, Leo Choirosphaktes presents an abstract system where the Dionysian apophaticism about the knowledge of God—reminiscent of Origen and Evagrius—is of prime order. The metaphor of light is often used and this is a metaphor that the iconoclasts such as John the Grammarian also employed; the light is the metaphor of *logos* and the divine force. It is the soul of man that is in the image of God, as Nazianzenus defended. The heavens and the science of heavens also play a very important role. The stars may influence human destinies and as Origen had said, they are signs. There is here a joint value attributed to science and nature. In a poem in honour of the emperor Constantine the Porphyrogenitus (r. 913–959), Leo insists on the marvellous character of nature that should not be spoiled by any other (artistic) form and this is rather an iconoclast-like thought. For Magdalino,

Leo transmits the essential thought of John the Grammarian. He was not the last, Magdalino says, to have employed the religion of Dionysius in order to create the religion of a philosopher.

## THE AMBIGUITY OF CONTINUITY

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According to the above, Theodore the Studite's thought about icons departs from the cosmological or naturalist and symbolic iconology of the iconoclasts, inspired by Dionysius. The posteriority of Theodore can also be used to understand his relation to Dionysius. Thus, Leo of Chalcedon, in the eleventh century, wrote against the re-evaluation of the matter in the icons. According to Barber (2007, 141), Leo's twin claims are: that the material being of the icon cannot be part of the subject it conveys; and yet there is a truthful relation between the icon and the subject. Against Leo of Chalcedon's position, Sebastokrator Isaac composed a florilegium (1080s–1090s), now in a lost codex, of which only the description remains. The florilegium included a series of passages from the writings of Theodore<sup>4</sup>.

For Theodore, *homoiosis* offers identity and distinction equally and thus only a relative worship is permitted<sup>5</sup>. Theodore has drawn an analogy between an icon and a mirror<sup>6</sup>, but concerning the icon he points<sup>7</sup> to a difference between veneration and adoration, while for Leo, the person depicted deserves veneration as well as adoration. The Synod at Blachernae in 1194/95 ended the affair with Leo of Chalcedon. The emperor Alexios Komnenos asked the Synod whether one should worship relatively or in adoration the images of the Lord. The Synod responded that one should only relatively worship the icon of the Christ, otherwise there would be confusion between divinity itself and the icon. The authority on the matter according to the Synod was Theodore the Studite and especially his letter to Athanasios quoted in Isaac Sebastokrator's florilegium.

The Komnenian official account of orthodoxy is *Panoplia Dogmatike*, a work by Euthymius Zigabenus where the chapter 22 (PG 130, 1164D–1173C), dedicated to the question of images, is greatly influenced by Theodore Studite's letter to his uncle Platon. Zigabenus opens his argument with a quote from Patriarch Nicephorus<sup>8</sup>, in fact a descriptive approach to iconology. The text continues relying greatly on Theodore<sup>9</sup>, and on this basis, Zigabenus will produce a relational theory of iconicity, in reality a paraphrasis of Theodore<sup>10</sup>. Zigabenus concludes in the footsteps of Theodore in a characteristic way<sup>11</sup>, which is rather distinct from the original Dionysian iconological lesson (see Barber 2007, 131–157).

P. J. Alexander has categorized iconophile thinking into traditionalist, Christological, and scholastic phases (see Lemerle 1986, 152). To this last phase belong Theodore and Patriarch Nicephorus. This last period implies the more extended use of Aristotelianism and especially of Aristotelian logic. Since the two scholars were not friendly with each other, it is possible, says Alexander that they were relying on older Byzantine scholars on the subject. We may speak here of a common party of Aristotelians and iconophiles



suggesting that the iconoclasts were not relying on Aristotle or, in other words, Aristotle was not propitious for their way of thinking. The teaching of Aristotle in Constantinople in the second half of the eighth century gave Nicephorus and Theodore the possibility to use the relevant information. One should refer to Patriarch John the Grammarian, a person of high Greek culture and a representative of the iconoclast party, initially a friend of Theodore the Studite, that is before manifesting his iconoclast preferences.

In an Anonymous *Antirrhetikos* against John the Grammarian, we perceive traces of the iconophile Aristotelian criticism of iconoclasm. John was considered a Hellenist and even more a Hellenic spirit, related to the religious politics of the emperor Leo the Armenian. In a text by the Grammarian quoted in the *Antirrhetikos*, one sees the iconoclast thematic of the refutation of the icons but nothing in it is especially Hellenic and is rather a trivial approach. The terms of 'interior light' and 'vision of the light' used here belong to the Dionysian legacy of iconoclasm. The itinerary from the natural to the mystical contemplation is also an idea familiar to the thought of Dionysius. The icon for John the Grammarian, if it is to be true, should guarantee the identity and even the definition of the incarnated Verb. The discourse in this regard is far superior to the visual representation. (see Gouillard 1966).

Whenever the Anonymous author does not reproduce the argument of the Grammarian, in his critique he makes use of Aristotelianism. There can be, he points out, no rigorous definition of the individual (see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1039 b 28 ff.; 1040a, 5–6). The category of the relation in order to prove the similarity between different entities is mentioned here and the author accuses the Grammarian of ignoring these distinctions. The similarity is not of the essences but of the qualities and the Grammarian, he writes, also ignores this aspect of the theory. That different forms equal different essences does not, in the end, disturb the resemblance between copy and archetype (see Aristotle, *Categories*, 11 a 15).

What can be the content of the possible Aristotelianism of the iconophiles? For Nicephorus and Theodore, icons neither represent nor embody God; in Aristotle (*Categories*, 6 a 35–6 b 2, 7b15), the archetype and the copy are correlated like categories, *pros ti*, in Greek, a notion that Theodore also uses (*kata to pros ti*, PG 99, 341 C)<sup>12</sup>. This is the Aristotelian idea about two pairs of which the one cannot exist without the other like master and slave, half and double, more and less, each half of the pair implying the other. Yet, although each one of the pair cannot exist without the other, the pairs should not be of the same substance, i.e. consubstantial. The reference to Aristotle helped iconophiles to avoid the accusation that their love of images implies the presence of the divine nature of God in the materiality of an icon (see Kharkhordin 2013, 205–207).

The difference between the symbolism of the cross and the anthropomorphism of the icon (on this difference, see Barber 2002, 83–105) is suggestive of the distinction between the Dionysian gradual dialectics towards the divine and the structural valuation of the icon in terms of adoration and veneration. Even though an image (icon) and its prototype (Christ) are interrelated like Aristotelian pairs, one half does not even touch the other. The Aristotelian category of the *pros ti* means 'pointed towards something', as the double is pointed towards a half, or a perception is always pointed towards that of which

it is a perception. An icon points to a substantially absent Christ so that one should not think of the relation icon/prototype in any Platonic sense of participation.

Even so, the unsubstantial archetype and icon permit a relationship with the divine. The graphic circumscription of Christ producing His image is relevant to this unsubstantial relation. Theodore writes: ‘

If the life-giving cross is venerated in its symbol, yet there are not two kinds of veneration, because the essence of the symbol is not venerated separately: then necessarily there are not two kinds of veneration when Christ is venerated in His image, because the essence of the image is not venerated. Rather, the veneration of Christ Himself and of Christ in the image is one and the same’ (424 A, Roth 1981, 104–105).

In other words, an icon is neither about idolic representation nor about participation (being part of something).

Dionysius’ *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* form his hierarchical representation of the world that is in great part borrowing from the Alexandrine world vision. The world is an order, it is objective, and it springs from God. The intermediary beings ascertain the hierarchical division of the world. The sensible is thus related to the intelligible through a scale of mediating entities that are more and more intellectual than sensible and in any case the sensible is in the image of the intelligible. The creation is shown to be a procession where the empowerment of the matter follows any distance, greater or smaller, taken from the intellectual source that can only be outdone by the conversion to the highest principle. If for Christianity the movement is interior, Dionysius is still in part attached to the cosmology of late antiquity.

The iconographical idea that better stands for Dionysius is that of the spiritual ladder. This visual form carries all the ambiguity of the coexistence of the cosmological sphere with subjective interiority. The monastic existence represents the return to the spiritual highest principle through escalated degrees of spirituality. We find this iconographic theme close to *Apocalypse* 22.13–14, in the Coptic art of the fourth century, i.e. prior to the dating of the Areopagetic corpus (sixth century). Syrian texts offer theoretical justifications for this identification of Christian spirituality with the escalating upward movement. Isaac of Antioch writes that Jesus’ cross is a ladder and Jacob of Sarug describes the cross as a miraculous ladder. The cross and the ladder may have nothing in common as to real perception; the ladder is only an attribute of the cross and it allows access to the only possible path towards the cross. Thus, the incompatibility of the perceptions of the cross and the ladder is overcome by their theoretical proximity, which is ascertained by the existence of only a scale towards the divine, that of the cross. John Climacus (sixth–seventh century) integrates this idea into ascetic literature; his work acquired a great popularity and influence also Western iconography. The iconographic representation may be limited to the sole ladder or may be extended so as to include the figures of monks who are going up or even the ladder may be cut to different thematic cycles in reference to the chapters of the Holy Scripture that may follow the picture. In that sense, the ladder is kept close to the text and the process of writing (see Heck 1999, 29–42).

To the above, the anthropomorphic naturalism of Theodore's iconology adds the idea of figuration. Yet, despite this difference, the Studite monks contributed to the diffusion of the Dionysian text and to its influence on Western thought and art<sup>13</sup>. What are the comparisons to be made between the Constantinopolitan scholasticism and the Latin scholasticism? There is the hypothesis that the famous manuscript of the works of Dionysius the Areopagite that was offered to the king of the Franks, Louis the Pious, in 827 was made by Studite monks. Another hypothesis is that the Dionysian corpus was copied in order to be offered to the Frankish monarch from a great florilegium composed by Theodore. R. J. Loenertz defended the idea that an iconoclast embassy to Louis the Pious brought, manuscripts, together with other gifts, translated into Latin, that were to be used in the Frankish synod of 825. This gift initiated the Western confusion between Dionysius the Areopagite and Dionysius from Paris. For that reason, the next Byzantine embassy in 827 brought a full text of Dionysius' works. This manuscript must have been composed after an order of the Constantinopolitan court in the months before 827. Julien Leroy sees similarities between the surviving text of Dionysius in Paris with a majuscule partially surviving manuscript of the *Grand catechism* of Theodore, now in the library of the Vatican. Both manuscripts are dated at the same time and have probably the same origin, i.e. the Studite scriptorium. Leroy gives many examples of the conservation of the majuscule writing in the Studite scriptoria that have initiated the minuscule writing; minuscule and majuscule thus co-existed. The manner of taking the manuscript out of the Studite scriptorium with an iconoclast purpose is problematic but different possibilities have been proposed up to now (Lemerle 1986, 6–7).

Georges Duby proposed a relationship between the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the theology of Dionysius and the feudal hierarchy in the West, a relationship that is found in Suger, his principal theorist. Erwin Panofsky has related the Dionysian Neoplatonic theology of Suger of Saint-Denis to Gothic architecture. Panofsky's interpretative model posits that Gothic architecture must be a transposition of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of light where the celestial divine light is reflected on the terrestrial materiality, and thus, the human intellect may be elevated to the knowledge of God. This is a model that met with great echoes in the history of art and neighbouring disciplines. According to Panofsky, Suger was particularly influenced by the Neoplatonic philosophy of Dionysius in the midst of a confusion concerning the identities of the disciple of Saint-Paul and the patron of the Church of Saint-Denis. Thus the manuscript of the *Celestial Hierarchy* was attributed to this last patron saint. Panofsky distinguishes many references of Suger to Dionysius in a sort of 'orgy of Neoplatonic metaphysics of light'. Yet, Panofsky never establishes a causal link between this metaphysics and Gothic architecture as posterity often thought. Later, it was Otto von Simson who claimed that without the Dionysian metaphysics there would be no such architecture as the Gothic. The difference of styles, the Byzantine and the Gothic, thus suggests the divergence of the reception of Dionysian system and yet the communication between the two worlds is strongly evidenced (see Reudenbach 1994). The intermediary role of the Studite monks shows that they acknowledged the instrumental value of the Dionysian text.

## DIONYSIUS, THEODORE, AND ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

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When we speak of the Studite monks we must have in mind not only the monastery of Saint Ioannes of Stoudios in Constantinople but also the other monasteries that have housed Platon, Theodore, and the other Studite monks. All these monasteries were centres of copying activity, i.e. scriptoria. Platon, although not a man of great culture, was a calligrapher and a scribe who copied a large number of manuscripts. It does not seem that he ever copied a work of lay culture, i.e. other than of religious content. Theodore, in contrast, was the son of a rich family, his father occupied a high position in Constantinopolitan bureaucracy and he had followed the full course of education for his times. As a monk and abbot, he insisted on the practical aspects of monastic life. When Nicephorus, ancient clerk of the imperial secretary, succeeded the Patriarch Tarasius at 806 both Platon and Theodoros objected to this succession on the grounds that it is not proper to become an Ecclesiastic high official straight from the rank of layman. In regard to the monastic community that supported the icons, Theodore the Studite's position is obviously better situated than Patriarch Nicephorus'.

Theodore is known to have produced reform in communal monastic life, and in particular perfecting the monastic rules of Saint Basil the Great. Notably, Theodore thought about order in the monastery and proposed the creation of positions for supervising monks in order to control the behaviour of over a thousand monks living together. On his deathbed, he advised that the election of future bishops be done by council opinion and according to the will of the community (PG 99, 1817A–B; see Kharkhordin 2013, 209–212, here especially 210). His idea of the monastic community is characterized by equity of opinions, even though the monks are differentiated according to functional specializations much like the various parts of the human body. He is thus quite close to the Aristotelian biology of organic parts. In any case, the heart and soul of the monk must not be primarily concerned with people of this world other than the community of the solitary devoted to God (PG 99, 1817 D).

Saint Basil the Great, whom Theodore frequently quotes<sup>14</sup>, and his ideal of the monastic community will help us understand Theodore's project. The *oikonomia*—*οικονομία* in Greek, is the subject of an analysis by Marie-José Mondzain (see Mondzain 2005; Kharkhordin 2013, 211): it is not the household governance as in Xenophon; the Church Fathers used the term *oikonomia* on the limits of a general plan of salvation, where God governs the *oikos* as well as the whole world. Then, since original sin has interrupted the unity of nature, *oikonomia* appears as the structure of the fragmented world of sin. The restoration of the world takes place in the central sacrament of the Eucharist, when Christians partake in the flesh and blood of Christ, but it can also happen in the peaceful and communal monastic life.

Ancient Greek philosophy and especially Aristotle had some thoughts about how singular life relates to the whole life. Aristotle expressed how 'marvellous is life' when

composing, in his *Part of the Animals I*, the Encomium of Biological sciences (644 b 22–645 a 31). In the Middle Ages, among the different ways of interpreting human existence exiled from Paradise which faces God as creator, there is the more mystical tradition that follows on from Dionysius the Areopagite, forming a mystagogical interpretation (see Tollefsen 2018, 162). In terms of Dionysian negative theology, the subject is expected to proceed through consecutive stages of ascendance to the transcendent One. This is a rather individualized image, quite distinct from the communal life advocated by Theodore.

As to ecclesiastical hierarchy, the episcopal power goes not without coercion. Nicephorus, after his accession to the throne, in 806, sent bishops all over the empire to ensure that the monastic reform was successfully carried out, notably amongst the double monasteries that hosted male and female alike. Up to then, there were bishops and patriarchs who had been weak in the face of monastic authority, while in monastic theory the bishop is a priest as well as a monk and many high officials of Byzantium up until then had come from the monastic ranks. The reaction against the monastic party is reminiscent of the words of Dionysius that no one should monopolize the *sacerdotium*. In a letter to the Studite monks, included in an opusculum trying to justify Theodore's revolt without producing any nuisance to the Patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, a passage which claims that the Patriarch is like an Apostle is attributed to Dionysius (see Darrouzès 1987, 20–22). For the writer, who follows Dionysius, the monks have only one mission, i.e. to master their anger, desire, and tongue. They should not judge other members of the clergy or any layperson, they should not seize the function of priests who responded to the call of God. According to the Dionysian hierarchy, the priest should only be delimited by the bishops and the bishops only by the Apostles and by the heirs of the Apostles, i.e. the Patriarchs, since the inferior is governed by the superior; to each one the function and rank that is appropriate for him/her. How could a priest communicate the divine message if he ignored the power that supports it? The proximity to God assures the nobility of the message. The proximity to light, according to Dionysius, makes someone more holy and the distance from it, makes him less; this proximity, of course, does not refer to space but to the capacity to receive God. Dionysius does not speak of Patriarchs but of bishops who are subordinate to Patriarchs. Thus, according to the author of the letter, there are two kinds of ecclesiastical officials: the Patriarchs and all the rest, bishops and priests alike who are hierarchs in the sense of Dionysius. Thus, the monks and the abbots of the monks are deprived of every canonical ambition as to their status. This was clearly not Theodore's idea of the place of monks in Byzantine society and he naturally fought against it.

Theodore's point is that no compromise of the Patriarch with the imperial power can be accepted even under the imperative of *oikonomia*. The emperor can be an image of God in a world the order of which is fixed like in Dionysius. As to ecclesiastic power, it is evident that Theodore's views present a mixture of Dionysian as well as of Aristotelian elements in order to protect the autonomy of the monastic party and its convictions about representation and the structure of Christian society.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank Mr Vasileios Stratis for his remarks.
2. Gouillard 1977–8, 37 notes that the Iconoclasm has not managed to recruit amidst the spiritual men of Byzantium.
3. For a short introduction to the study of Byzantine theology, see Arabatzis 2011.
4. These passages are: *Letter to the Monk Stephanos*, Fatouros 445, 627–629; *Letter to the spatharios Niketas*, Fatouros 476, 685–687; *Letter to the asecretis Diogenes*, Fatouros 491, 725–726; *Letter to Athanasios*, Fatouros 428, 599–600; *Letter to John the Grammarian*, Fatouros 546, 825–827; *Letter to Platon*, Fatouros 57, 164–168; *First Antirrhetikos*, PG, 99, 328–352; see Barber 2007, 143, n. 51.
5. I, Fatouros 65, 49–66, 59; see Barber 2007, 145.
6. I, Fatouros 167, 81–101; see Barber 2007, 146.
7. I, Fatouros 67, 107–168, 113; see Barber 2007, 147.
8. PG, 100, 277 A quoted in PG, 130, 1164 D–1165 A; see Barber 2007, 152.
9. PG, 130, 1165 A–C, based on PG, 99, 368 C, then Fatouros 57, 33–35 and Fatouros 57, 17–70; see Barber 2007, 153.
10. PG, 130, 1165 D–68 A, a paraphrase of Fatouros 528, 51–54; see Barber 2007, 154.
11. PG, 130, 1168 C; see Barber 2007, 154.
12. Tollefsen underscores that this relation is distinct from likeness, which Theodore also endorses (Tollefsen 2018, 45).
13. Brubaker underscores that except for the Studite monks under Theodore's leadership, there is no evidence that monks as a group, were particularly pro-image (see Brubaker 2012, 118). This remark underscores the political–theological force of the Studite monks.
14. Damian says that Theodore reproduces texts of Dionysius that are almost Basilian in character (Damian 2002, 180).

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## CHAPTER 17

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# DIONYSIUS FROM NIKETAS STETHATOS TO GREGORY THE SINAITE (AND GREGORY PALAMAS)

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ANTONIO RIGO

RESEARCH on Byzantine mysticism has been often biased by the idea that Dionysius did not play any relevant role on Eastern spirituality. First expressed by Irénée Hausherr in a lecture in 1935,<sup>1</sup> and later endorsed by eminent scholars such as John Meyendorff,<sup>2</sup> this view considers Dionysius's contributions to have come too late to have an impact on Eastern theological tradition.

Recent studies of texts long ignored by scholars,<sup>3</sup> along with critical editions on hitherto unedited texts,<sup>4</sup> suggest that, on the contrary, Dionysius played an important role in the development of Byzantine mysticism and urged students of Eastern spirituality to question the preceding interpretative scheme.

After the early formative period (the fourth through to the seventh century), with authors such as Evagrius Ponticus (*d.* 399), pseudo-Macarius the Egyptian, Maximus the Confessor (*d.* 662), John Climacus (6th–7th-century), and others, and after the 'dark age' in Byzantine history, Byzantine mysticism underwent two transformations: the first dating from the mid-tenth to the mid-twelfth century; the second, shorter period, dating from the mid-thirteenth century to the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Both these stages include different and at times conflicting trends, which makes it challenging to forcibly reduce all material to a few schemes. In this respect this essay maintains that the genealogical approach based on the distinction between different 'schools of spirituality' proves largely unsatisfactory for reconstructing the rich variety of Byzantine spirituality. In contrast, this essay suggests adopting a different perspective based on text transmission and the study of the manifold, and sometimes divergent, outcomes of the circulation of texts. In both these stages the impact of earlier authors is evident, but the presence and varying interpretations of one and the same text determine

the historical evolution of the different stages. In fact, the fortune of the Church Fathers suggests that their influence on later authors often lead to unpredictable outcomes. In this respect it is noteworthy that the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite reappears in the eleventh century with Niketas Stethatos after having been absent in the earlier period.

## THE HIERARCHIES FROM NIKETAS STETHATOS TO GREGORY THE SINAITE

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To start with we will describe the eleventh-century fortunes of Dionysius. During this period there are important witnesses suggesting that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was recirculated. These include philosophical texts, such as John Italos' scholia on *Celestial Hierarchy*.<sup>6</sup> But the most relevant figure in this process is Niketas Stethatos (*d. c.* 1090)<sup>7</sup>, a disciple of the great Byzantine mystic Symeon the New Theologian (*d.* 1022). As a polemical Niketas composed treatises against the Armenians, the Jews, and the Latins and took part in the events that led to the Schism of 1054. In the following decades Niketas became the head of the Monastery of Stoudios and composed key works in the history of Eastern spirituality: three *centuriae* of chapters and a trilogy of opuscles devoted to the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy, the heaven and the soul.

At the beginning of his career, starting in 1035, Niketas edited the work of his master, Symeon the New Theologian. For the purpose of this paper, Niketas' edition of Symeon's *Hymns* is particularly relevant. Starting with the title (likely chosen by Niketas himself), *Hymns of Divine Eros*, which echoes one of Dionysius' fictitious works (or possibly a lost one), namely, *On the Divine Hymns*, and the work attributed to Dionysius' master, Hierotheus, namely, the *Erotic Hymns*. Niketas' prologue to the hymns exposes the author's dependence on Dionysius. Here Niketas excerpts from the *Divine Names*<sup>8</sup> in order to defend his master, whom he compares to Dionysius himself, from critics. According to Niketas, Symeon had spiritual experiences of the kind described by Dionysius in the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. This interpretation of Symeon's mystical experience, along with Niketas' presentation of Symeon as the 'second Dionysius', is apparent in Niketas' scholia to the *Hymns* as well. Yet, the analysis of this Symeon text shows that the latter knew the *Corpus Areopagiticum* well, but did not stick closely to the literal interpretation of the text. It is rather that Niketas is the one to highlight Symeon's connection to Dionysius.<sup>9</sup>

Among Niketas' ascetical writings the most important, the ones which had an enduring impact on later authors, are surely the *Practical, Physical and Gnostic Chapters*, composed by Niketas late in life.<sup>10</sup> Not only does Niketas incorporate Dionysius' vocabulary in his description of the divine nature, but he also allows Dionysian theology to penetrate deeply into his work. Concerning for instance the description of the spiritual life, Niketas accepted the traditional distinction between novices, intermediates, and perfects, but interprets it through the prism of the Dionysian distinction between the different functions in the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies: the purificative,

the illuminating, and the perfective. Niketas, however, appropriates this Dionysian distinction among different functions in the hierarchies as a model for describing the different stages in the monks' spiritual life: 'The purgative stage pertains to those newly engaged in spiritual warfare'; 'the illuminative stage pertains to those who as a result of their struggles have attained the first level of dispassion'; 'the mystical and perfective stage pertains to those who have already passed through all things and have come to 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'.<sup>11</sup>

As a matter of fact Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite is the source of other themes in Niketas' work, like the reversion of the soul and its powers, the restoration of men's primitive perfection that was lost because of sin, and finally the restoration of men's similitude with God. With regard to this latter theme, Niketas often quotes the following passage from the *Ecclesiastic Hierarchy*: 'Deification is assimilation to God as far as possible'.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Dionysius is Niketas' source in his description of the mind's passage from dispersion to unity, the latter being the peak of the spiritual path: 'the highest goal of hesychia, a condition of rest and eternal circular movement, the assimilation to the Seraphym and Cherubins' orders'.<sup>13</sup>

The trilogy *On the Soul*, *On Heaven*, and *On Hierarchy*<sup>14</sup> belongs to Stethatos' late career. Even in these later works the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite is vast. The treatise *On Hierarchy* exposes Stethatos' dependence on Dionysius more than the other works. A short treatise with a limited circulation, the text is built on citations from the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Stethatos divided the material into nine chapters (nine like the angelic orders) and aiming to prove that 'the ecclesiastical hierarchy belongs to the same rank as the celestial one, as demonstrated by Dionysius'.<sup>15</sup> Taking a cue from *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 7, Niketas remarked that the aim of the hierarchy is to assimilate and unite with God and that 'our hierarchy is of the same kind as the coelestial one', insofar as both are divided into three triads of orders.<sup>16</sup> To be honest, such correspondence is not evident in Dionysius. In fact, according to Dionysius, the celestial hierarchy consists of nine orders in three triads, whereas the ecclesiastical one has six orders and two triads. This apparent contradiction can be explained easily if one bears in mind that in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* Dionysius described the actual structure of the Church of his time.

#### DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

##### CELESTIAL HIERARCHY

Angels

Archangels

Principalities

Dominions

Virtues

Powers

Thrones

Cherubim

Seraphim

## ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

	Purified orders
Initiated	Laity
	Monks
	Ministers
Initiators	Priests
	Bishops

Since there is not perfect symmetry between the two hierarchies, the Byzantine commentators of Dionysius attempted to restore a balance between celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy and a perfect symmetry between heaven and earth. Because of this Niketas' *On Hierarchy* established the following equivalence:

## NIKETAS STETHATOS

## ECCLESIASTIC HIERARCHY

Monks  
Readers  
Subdeacons  
Deacons  
Priests  
Bishops  
Archbishops  
Metropolitans  
Patriarchs

## CELESTIAL HIERARCHY

Angels  
Archangels  
Principalities  
Powers  
Virtues  
Dominions  
Seraphim  
Cherubim  
Thrones

A few decades after Niketas, around the middle of the twelfth century, Peter Damascenus<sup>17</sup> reached similar conclusions. Writes Peter: 'there are nine orders in heaven just as in the Church'.<sup>18</sup> Yet, while being similar in general to Stetathos' hierarchies, at times Peter's analogy between the two orders differs.

## PETER DAMASCENUS

## ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

Monks  
Cantors  
Readers  
Subdeacons  
Deacons  
Priests  
Bishops  
Metropolitans  
Patriarchs

## CELESTIAL HIERARCHY

Angels  
Archangels  
Principalities  
Powers  
Virtues  
Dominions  
Seraphim  
Cherubim  
Thrones

Let us go back to Niketas' text and the hierarchical scheme proposed there. Just like his master, Symeon the New Theologian, Niketas believed that one truly becomes a bishop only on receiving the illumination of the Spirit.<sup>19</sup> This assumption would seem to compromise the whole scheme. Furthermore, in those very same pages Niketas proposes an alternative interpretation of the celestial hierarchy that establishes a parallel with the stages of the spiritual journey. In this regard Niketas adapted some hints found in the *Chapters* into a different context. According to him there exists a correspondence between Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim, on the one hand, and Apostles, Prophets, Fathers, Theophors, ecumenical masters, on the others. The latter are those 'who entered mystical theology taking the cue from natural contemplation'. In the same vein Niketas establishes a correspondence between Powers, Dominions, Virtues, and confessors and ascetics, namely those 'who moved from practical philosophy to the height of contemplation'. Finally, Niketas draws a parallel between Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, on the one hand, and Chiefs, Hegumens, and laymen who excelled in 'practical philosophy and their observance of the divine commands'.<sup>20</sup>

Niketas Stethatus' works reveal the strong dependence of their author upon Dionysius the Areopagite and his *Divine Names*, *Celestial Hierarchy*, and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Not only does Niketas depend on Dionysius in terms of vocabulary, but also concerning the description of the spiritual journey, the mind's reconversion and union with God, and its state in the mystical experience. Furthermore, as indicated earlier, Niketas adapted the Dionysian hierarchies with special emphasis on their spiritual significance.

The second phase in Byzantine mysticism starts with and is dominated by Gregory the Sinaite (d. c. 1346), a pivotal figure in the history of Greek and Slavonic (Serbian and Bulgarian) spirituality.<sup>21</sup> At this time the popularity of Dionysius' work was massive: George Pachymeres (c. 1242–1310), for instance, paraphrased the entire *Corpus*.<sup>22</sup> Around 1330, at the time of his stay in Constantinople, Barlaam the Calabrian received the title of master in theology of 'the divine Dionysius' from the *megas domestikos* (supreme military commander) John Cantacuzenus.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Barlaam was a controversial figure because of his involvement in the most important fourteenth-century polemics. For those involved in the Palamite controversy, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* played an important role right from the beginning (we think during the discussion between Barlaam the Calabrian, Gregory Palamas, and Gregory Akindynos), and continued to be influential on those who took part in these controversies at a later stage as well (Isaac Argryrus, John Kyparissiotis, Manuel Calecas). Furthermore, on the Mount Athos, Isaija of Serres completed in 1371 his Slavonic translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Isaija was heavily influenced by the teachings of Gregory the Sinaite and his school. A similar interest in Dionysius is evident in Bulgaria as well.<sup>24</sup>

Gregory the Sinaite was first a monk on Mount Sinai and then moved to the Holy Mountain. Afterwards he founded a monastery in Bulgaria, at Paroria, where he established a school that included both Greek and Slavic disciples such as Callistus I, Isidorus I, Theodosius of Trnovo, and Athanasius of Meteora. Gregory's works had a tremendous impact on spiritual authors both then and in later generations, from Nil

Sorskij, in fifteenth-century Russia, to Basil of Poiana Mărului and Paisij Veličkovski, during the eighteenth century, on Mount Athos and in Moldavia.

Gregory's series of *Chapters* published in the *Philokalia* belong almost entirely to the early stage of his career, when Gregory was a monk on Mount Athos. They are basically short memories addressed to his disciples and to Athonite monks concerning interior praying, daily ascetical life, the discernment of spirits, the passions, and finally obedience. Among the most important works of Gregory, the *Acrostic Chapters* surely shine as the work in which the author touches on a wider variety of themes. Among other spiritual authors, this work contains several influences taken from the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.<sup>25</sup> Dionysius is also present in a number of Gregory's other writings (chapters and hymns), which are extant only in the Slavonic translation prepared by Gregory's disciples in the monastery of Paroria. They probably belong to Gregory's later career (between 1331 and 1334) and include thirteen chapters preserved both in Greek and Slavonic, known as *On the Four Hierarchies*.<sup>26</sup> These chapters consist almost exclusively of notes taken from Gregory's disciples and may be divided into three sections, the first being devoted to the hierarchies, the second to monastic life, and the third to divine liturgy. Among the most important sources of these chapters, Dionysius' *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* play a decisive role in the description of the interior life of the monk and his spiritual journey.

Gregory's starting point is the aim and activity proper to each hierarchy. In this respect he cites the very same passage that attracted Niketas Stetathus' attention three centuries earlier.

In general a hierarchy stems from the participation and distribution of the sacred gift, spiritual and bodily; alternatively, hierarchy is the principle, sacrament and distribution of the saints who live a saint life; or the distributive science according to virtue; or, to quote from the great Dionysius, 'the assimilation and union with God.' 'Assimilation' to God means participating in the divine and human goods within the related operation and participation, whereas 'union' with God means to become God-like through the divine communion, insofar as possible to human beings.<sup>27</sup>

Just like Niketas Stethatos, Gregory the Sinaite too aimed to establish a perfect correspondence between celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. In so doing he introduced a further hierarchy, the monastic one. In this way he managed to preserve Dionysius' triadic structure within a quaternary structure. At the very beginning of his *Chapters* Gregory writes:

The Trinity causes everything in the intellectual hierarchy; the intellectual hierarchy causes everything in the rational one, namely the monastic hierarchy; the latter causes everything in the symbolic one and the symbolic one causes everything in the legal one. They all receive the first fruits of season and tithes. The latter two bestow material gifts, whereas the formers bestow immaterial and divine gifts: the legal hierarchy bestows the lamb; the symbolic one bestows bread; the monastic one

bestows Christ in the Spirit; the intellectual one sacrifices and participates in the Word made flesh and communicates to everything else its very name, Israel, that is to say the mind that sees God. However, in the first two hierarchies God is named in an improper manner, whereas in the latter He is named appropriately. According to the first the temple is the tent, according to others the temple is the material altar, according to others the temple is the creation, beings and soul, whereas for the intellectual ones temple is the intellectual realities, immaterial and divine.<sup>28</sup>

One of the reasons for adopting a quaternary structure is Gregory's intention to preserve monasticism as an autonomous hierarchy different than the ecclesiastical; or, alternatively, he did so because of the symbolism in number four. Four are the Gospels, four the sacramental and liturgical practices, four the cardinal virtues. Furthermore, this number symbolizes the celestial realities. As a matter of fact, in the earlier *Homily on the Transfiguration*, composed in the 1330s during his stay on the Holy Mountain, Gregory speaks of the fourfold significance of this feast.<sup>29</sup> This passage is the key for understanding the quaternary structure of Gregory's hierarchy. The first level is described using vocabulary related to the Law, which, as like a shadow, symbolizes the truth (here Gregory thinks of Elias the prophet on Mount Oreb). For obvious reasons it corresponds to the legal hierarchy. The second level is described as a truthful and sign-bearer figure and corresponds to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The monastic hierarchy is described as the image and glory of the Christ. Finally, the angelical hierarchy corresponds to the divine illumination. The references to illumination and glory are reminiscent of monastic spirituality, while the notions of 'shadow' and 'figure' hark back to biblical exegesis and mystagogic literature. At the very core of Gregory's attention lay the sacrifice and the temple. To the latter he devoted the last part of the *Homily*. From what has been said earlier, it is possible to draw the following parallels:

Lamb	Legal Hierarchy	Tend
Bread (Eucharistic)	Symbolical Hierarchy (ecclesiastical)	Altar
Christ in the Spirit	Rational Hierarchy (monastic)	Creation, being, soul
Word made Flesh	Intellectual Hierarchy (angelical)	Immaterial Realities

When seen under this light the many obscure passages found in Gregory's earlier works become clearer. In fact, in the *Acrostic Chapters* Gregory had already elaborated at length on Moses' tent, the lamb, and the temple using Dionysius' vocabulary.<sup>30</sup>

In the *Chapters on the Four Hierarchies* Gregory further develops the triadic structure of the four hierarchies. When describing the qualities and features of each order he quoted from Dionysius almost literally. In this regard Gregory extends the existing harmony between the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies to the whole universe and argues that the fourfold structure of the hierarchies is based on the balance in the different triads and orders.



LEGAL	ECCLESIASTICAL	MONASTIC	ANGELICAL
	HIERARCHY (SYMBOLIC)	HIERARCHY	HIERARCHY
HIERARCHY		(RATIONAL)	(INTELLECTUAL)
Levites		SUBORDINATES	
	Deacons	Deacons	Angels
	Subdeacons	Subdeacons	Archangels
	Hierodeacons	Hierodeacons	Principalities
Scribes		PRATICALS	
	Priests	Cantors	Virtues
	Bishops	Singers	Powers
	Archbishops	Ministers	Dominions
Hierarchs	Patriarchs	CONTEMPLATIVES	Seraphim Cherubim Thrones

This fourfold structure can be explained in light of Gregory's inclusion of the monastic hierarchy in the list of hierarchies, i.e. the legal, the ecclesiastical, and the angelical. The autonomy granted by Gregory to the monastic hierarchy is extremely relevant insofar as the author implies that the monastic order is more important than the ecclesiastical. In this respect Gregory agrees with the earlier Symeon the New Theologian,<sup>31</sup> a well-respected authority in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Byzantine monasticism, that the spiritual is more important than the earthly hierarchy. Tellingly, Byzantine monks are known for often taking sides against the hierarchy, as in the case of the Lyon Synod planned by Michael VIII in 1274 for the union of the Western and Eastern Churches; or such as the case of the *Tome of the Holy Mountain*<sup>32</sup> issued before the Synod of Constantinople in 1341 etc.

Gregory argued in favour of the monks' primacy over the ecclesiastical hierarchy on the basis of Dionysius' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 6, 1, 3, where the author described the monks as the highest ordered among the initiated. Writes Gregory: 'It must be said that discourse judged and pointed out that the monastic virtuous life is higher than the ecclesiastical hierarchy'. Nonetheless, Gregory also acknowledged that the monastic order is subordinated to the ecclesiastical hierarchy 'according to the divine decrees' and that the latter hierarchy is like a mother 'in regenerating the virtue and the grace'.<sup>33</sup>

Gregory also cribbed from Dionysius when elaborating on the inner structures of the hierarchies. In this regard he wrote that 'also the monastic order is divided into three kinds, namely that of the subordinates, that of the practical and that of the contemplative ones'.<sup>34</sup> This division into three classes matches another division, namely that into the

beginners, the intermediates, and the perfected. In the *Chapters on the Four Hierarchies* Gregory further elaborated on this division under the influence of Dionysius' threefold division in the hierarchic activities (purifying, illuminating, perfecting).

The monastic hierarchy has three distributive sciences: the introductive, the practical and the contemplative. In these the hierarchy gets purified, enlightened and perfected. For the beginners the hierarchic and distributive operation consists of obedience as purification by decrease of the passions. For the practical ones [the hierarchic and distributive operation] are the practice, the asceticism, the continuous salmody and the vigil, through which the hierarchy is illuminated by rejecting the darkness due to the passions. For the contemplative [the hierarchic and distributive operation] is the contemplation that purifies, illuminates and makes perfect the hesychia. Within this hierarchy the contemplatives become perfect and become mystic hierarchs God-alike and acquire their perfection.<sup>35</sup>

According to Gregory the intermediate state of the 'practical' monks (which he equates to Virtues, Powers, and Dominion) belongs to those who practise the liturgical chant and salmody. The third state in the monastic order is not a tripartite one, but is rather Unitarian. It corresponds to the highest triad in the celestial hierarchy that includes Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones. The monks who share this condition, namely the hesychast and contemplative monks, are characterized with having the same properties as the first angelic order. 'Igneous, seraphic and God-like, they have a purificative power proper to their *hesychia*'. These monks are 'igneous' just like 'the Thrones are made of fire'; 'the most elevated Seraphim are incandescent beings', for 'fire is typical of the God-like celestial intelligences'. Thus they are 'seraphic', 'God-alike', 'cherubic insofar as they possess the illuminative, gnostic and sapiential faculty, and an operation proper to their condition'. Writes Gregory:

Quiet Thrones are the complaisant, the simple, sincere and unknown, those who have been enriched by the good negative knowledge proper to the perfect ekstasis towards God, namely they do not know any of the beings, for they only know He who is who he is and have been regarded as resting in God. If the souls are truly simple—it has been said—they are thrones in the spiritual sense.<sup>36</sup>

In the *Chapters on the Four Hierarchies* the highest triad in the angelical hierarchy corresponds to the peak of the monks' spiritual journey. In this respect Gregory is consistent with what he had previously stated in the *Acrostic Chapters*, namely that there are three steps in the prayer:

Noetic prayer is an activity initiated by the cleansing power of the Spirit and the mystical rites celebrated by the intellect. Similarly, stillness is initiated by attentive waiting upon God, its intermediate stage is characterized by illuminative power and contemplation, and its final goal is ecstasy and the enraptured flight of the intellect towards God.<sup>37</sup>

When writing the *Chapters on the Four Hierarchies*, Gregory appears to be a Dionysius commentator in every respect.<sup>38</sup> In this work he constantly appeals to Dionysius to describe the monastic condition and its different stages. He adapts the angelical hierarchy to the stages in the spiritual life and believes that the features proper to the highest celestial orders are proper to the monks as well, when these have reached the peak of contemplation. In this regard Gregory made explicit that which Niketas Stethatos had merely insinuated. It should be noted that Gregory even invited his disciples to read Niketas' *Chapters*, while he used his treatise *On Hierarchy* for his work on the same subject. However, while appropriating Stethatos, Gregory still read and elaborated on Dionysius directly.

## MONASTICISM. THE *LETTER TO DEMOPHILUS* AND *ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY* 6: FROM METHODIUS I TO GREGORY THE SINAITE AND BEYOND

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As shown above Gregory's *Chapters* describe monasticism as an independent hierarchy different from the ecclesiastical one. Not only is the monastic hierarchy independent from the ecclesiastical, but to a certain extent it is even superior. From the liturgical and sacramental perspective, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is associated with the Eucharistic bread and the altar, whereas monastic sacrifice is associated with Christ in the Spirit and the altar corresponds to the entire creation and the soul.<sup>39</sup> While the ecclesiastical hierarchy supervises the symbols alone, the monastic hierarchy supervises both the symbols and the very truth itself.<sup>40</sup> In one of the chapters mentioned earlier, Gregory discusses this issue at length.

It must be said that discourse judged and pointed out that the monastic virtuous life is higher than the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In fact the latter is subordinated to the former because of the divine decrees. And it possesses a mother with respect to its birth and to the regeneration of habit and grace, even though they differ with regard to the position and ascent. And we maintain that just as the ecclesiastical hierarchy is alike the angelical one with regard to the theophoric condition ... so also the monastic hierarchy, beloved of God and virtuous, when it is immaterial and pure is alike the intellectual hierarchy with regard to poverty, celibacy and the erotic striving to God.<sup>41</sup>

In this chapter Gregory again follows Dionysius closely.<sup>42</sup> The latter discusses monasticism in *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 6 and more specifically in *Letter 8 to Demophilus*. Here monasticism is discussed from the point of view of the division within the ecclesiastical hierarchy between initiators and initiated. The former are (from the higher to the lower) the bishops, the priests, and the ministers; the latter are the monks, the holy people, and the purified orders. According to this distinction the monk occupies an intermediate position and plays no role in the Church's initiating power, even though monks imitate

the priestly orders in their perfect life. The monk lives a perfect life superior to that of the simple believers and in this they resemble priests.<sup>43</sup> Dionysius recalled that the order of the monks:

by reason of an entirely purified purification, through complete power and perfect chastity of its own operations, has attained to intellectual contemplation and communion in every ministration which it is lawful for it to contemplate, and is conducted by the most perfecting powers of the hierarchs, and taught by their inspired illuminations and hierarchical traditions the ministrations of the mystic rites, contemplated, according to its capacity.<sup>44</sup>

In the *Letter to Demophilus* Dionysius invited his addressee to give up his pretence to judge the sinner among the priests, for within the ecclesiastical hierarchy the order of the monks is lower than that of the priests.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, while revisiting the Platonic tripartite division in the soul, he outlined a series from the higher to the lower including apostles, bishops, priests, ministers, monks. Dionysius was pretty clear that this series should not be overturned and that each member must act according to their position.<sup>46</sup>

Both in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and in the *Letter to Demophilus* Dionysius insisted on the very same idea: monasticism is a particular condition for those who chose to live this condition, but its position within the hierarchy is far from being privileged, for monks occupy a lower rank than priests and ministers. Thus Gregory the Sinaite's reassessment of the monastic life differs to a great extent from Dionysius' intention. Curiously, Gregory established the primacy of the monks within the ecclesiastical hierarchy by referring to Dionysius' vocabulary, but in this way he betrayed the text of the Areopagite.

The Byzantine reception (and transformation) of Dionysius' view on the status of monks vis-à-vis that of priests within the ecclesiastical reception is extremely interesting. The first witness dates to the ninth century. In the immediate aftermath of the iconoclastic controversy, patriarch Methodius condemned the radical insubordination among the monks at the Stoudios monastery in a letter written in 845–846. Here the patriarch stated once again that monks are not supposed to judge priests, for the former are subordinated to the latter. After citing the canons of Chalcedon 4, 8, Antioch 5, and of the Apostles 55, 31, Methodius quoted a passage from Dionysius' *Letter to Demophilus*. In Methodius' intention this text worked as an admonition to preserve the hierarchical order of Apostles—Bishops—Priests—Ministers—Monks and forbade monks from criticizing or contesting the authority of priests and bishops on the basis that they occupied a higher position within the hierarchy.<sup>47</sup> This very same concern animates the *Pandektai* composed by Nikon of the Black Mountain (eleventh to twelfth century)<sup>48</sup> and is at the very core of the controversies surrounding the union of the Churches at the Council of Lyon in 1274.<sup>49</sup> All this evidence suggests Dionysius' *Letter to Demophilus* was an essential text for discussing the proper sequence in the ecclesiastical hierarchy: in this sequence monks were inferior to priests and bishops and were supposed to obey them.

By contrast, taking the cue from Dionysius as well, Gregory the Sinaite reached different conclusions than those elaborated by his predecessors on the basis of the *Letter*

to *Demophilus*. Gregory was not the only one reading Dionysius this way. The later Symeon of Thessalonica (*d.* 1429) answered the question ‘are priests superior to monks?’ in the following way:

With regard to the sequence priests are by far superior to monks. In fact, their works are God’s works insofar as no-one could be Christian without priesthood, nor can he receive the sacraments or be akin to God. However, the monastic order is superior to priesthood, not with regard to its function (for, as we have said, this is God’s work), but with regard to life. Through priesthood the priest always blesses and sanctifies the monks as well, who are superior with regard to life. For this reason even Anthony bowed not only to bishops, but to clergy. In light of his great dignity, each priest must live in a saintly manner and must strive to live like monks, or— even better—he must try to become a monk himself.<sup>50</sup>

In this way Symeon had few reservations in supporting the monks’ superiority over the priests on the basis that the holy life is that of the monks. In so doing he proposed a dialectics between priesthood and life according to which the former stands out over the rest because its works are divine, but can only be perfected in the monastic condition. Consequently, Symeon suggests that all priests should become monks. Interestingly, Symeon defends the monks’ superior state on the basis of Dionysius’ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 6, even though his text never really defended such a thesis. In this respect he clearly depends on Gregory the Sinaite’s reading of this very Dionysian text. However, being aware of the dramatic consequences of this assumption, both Gregory and Symeon agreed that the monks’ superiority over the other members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy could not be absolute. Thus Symeon remarked that ‘within the sequence’ priesthood is superior to the monastic condition insofar as the former is a divine work, while Gregory remarked that the monastic condition ‘according to the divine decrees’ is subordinated within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, being like a mother allowing ‘the regeneration of this condition and grace’.

In sum, while interpreting Dionysius, both Gregory and Symeon did so in a way reminiscent of the eleventh-century idea that monks were more important than priests insofar as the former exemplify a superior spiritual authority. Proof of this tension is found in the many official reprimands issued by canonists of simple monks who went beyond the limit of their condition. The latter were not priests, and yet they acted as spiritual fathers who ‘receive the believers’ thought’ and can ‘bind and solve’.<sup>51</sup>

## THE MIND’S CIRCULAR MOVEMENT IN THE DIVINE NAMES AND THE PRAYER

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During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (and beyond) one particular passage of Dionysius’ *On the Divine Names* gained prominence among Byzantine monks with

regard to the interpretation of the different types of prayer. Dionysius' text runs as follows:

[The soul] moves in a circle, that is, turns within itself and away from what is outside and there is an inner concentration of its intellectual powers. A sort of fixed revolution causes it to return from the multiplicity of externals, to gather in upon itself and then, in this undispersed condition, to join those who are themselves in a powerful union. From there the revolution brings the soul to the Beautiful and the Good, which is beyond all things, is one and the same, and has neither beginning nor end.<sup>52</sup>

This Dionysian text on the soul's circular movement and on the difference between the latter and the linear motion is transmitted in a florilegium containing spiritual and ascetical texts nowadays preserved in its earliest version in MS Haghion Oros, Mone Batopediou 57, along with other excerpts from Dionysius, Evagrius Ponticus, Maximus the Confessor, Isaac the Syrian, Diadocus of Photike, pseudo-Macarius the Egyptian, and the *Method of the holy prayer and attention* etc.<sup>53</sup>

But the earlier Niketas Stetathus had already mentioned the soul's circular movement in his *Chapters*. Here Niketas writes that he who reaches the peak in the spiritual path and becomes unified is like an angel, fixed in God in a condition of rest, but also in eternal circular movement: 'they revolve incessantly around around God inasmuch as He is the centre and the cause of their circular movement.'<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, several fourteenth-century spiritual authors had elaborated on this same notion, such as Patriarch Callistus I (d. 1364), who was Gregory the Sinaite's disciple.<sup>55</sup> In his homily *On the Four Cardinal Virtues and on the Monastic Institution* Callistus describes the mind's ascent from the material world to contemplation by cribbing imagery found in the Bible and in the Church Fathers (in particular John Climacus). In this regard Callistus refers to the image of birds' flight and, more importantly, to that of bees. In so doing he distinguishes between the mind's linear movement, on the one hand, and the more authentic circular movement, on the other, proper to spiritual contemplation.

The heart of a man always devoted to God is regarded as a field and a land. Consider the grapes that turn dark at the movement of his mind, as Solomon says 'Thy cheeks are as a piece of a pomegranate' (Ct. 4.3; 6.7) or as the same bed of straw of the virtues. Just as the bees collect honeycomb and honey from the flowers and, when sated, do not fly in a straight line because of the weight of the food, but fly a bit like in a circle until they reach the summit, then they proceed towards the beehive in a straight light, so it happens to those who cultivate the practical virtue: since they also collected the bed of straw of the virtues, they ascend somehow in a circle up to the peak of contemplation.<sup>56</sup>

A different reading of this Dionysian passage is found in Gregory Palamas (d. 1357).<sup>57</sup> In his early *Chapters on prayer and purity of heart* Gregory elaborates on Dionysius' vocabulary with regard to the reversion of the psychic powers and the mind's unification.<sup>58</sup> In the later *Triads* Gregory defended the prayers performed by the hesychast monks

from the attack of Barlaam the Calabrian and appealed to this Dionysian passage for supporting the prayer techniques elaborated by Nicephorus the Athonite and by the anonymous author of the *Method of the holy prayer and attention*.<sup>59</sup> Writes Palamas:

The mind operates in part according to its function of external observation: This is what the great Denys calls the movement of the mind 'along a straight line'; and on the other hand, it returns upon itself, when it beholds itself; this movement the same Father calls 'circular'. This last is the most excellent and most appropriate activity of the mind, by which it comes to transcend itself and be united to God.<sup>60</sup>

Palamas elaborated once more on the mind's circular movement of self-reversion when discussing psychic and somatic prayer techniques. He noted that such movement of the mind is reflected in the curved shape of the monk's body during prayer:

Thus, the man who seeks to make his mind return to itself needs to propel it not only in a straight line but also in the circular motion that is infallible. How should such a one not gain great profit if, instead of letting his eye roam hither and thither, he should fix it on his breast or on his navel, as a point of concentration? For in this way, he will not only gather himself together externally, conforming as far as possible to the inner movement he seeks for his mind; he will also, by disposing his body in such a position, recall into the interior of the heart a power which is ever flowing outwards through the faculty of sight.<sup>61</sup>

Thus in a purely psychological fashion Gregory understood the soul's circular motion in the *Divine Names* as a basis for his own doctrine of prayer. As such, the circular motion does not concern the mind's unification alone, but refers to the actual prayer techniques involving the body.

This doctrine had quite a resonance among late Byzantine and early modern spiritual authors. At the end of the fourteenth century Callistus and Ignatius Xanthopoulos<sup>62</sup> composed their chapters on prayer cited the previously mentioned passage from the *Divine Names* and accepted Gregory Palamas' early interpretation of it:

This work is the circular movement, that is, the return of the mind to itself, conversion and union, and through itself with God. This is the only movement that is truly without error and that does not make mistakes, because it is free of ties and meditation and is a superior union to intellection and superior vision to vision.<sup>63</sup>

In around 1800 Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, the distinguished editor of the *Philokalia*, accepted Gregory Palamas' theory of prayer and Dionysius' circular motion of the mind discussed in the *Divine Names*. One of the chapters in his *Handbook of Spiritual Counsel* is devoted to *the mind's perfect descent into the heart*. Here Nicodemus wrote:

The spiritual meditation is referred to by St Dionysius Areopagites, who mentions three forms: the direct, the spiral, and finally the circular, which alone is certain and



without deception. It is referred to as circular meditation because as to the periphery of the circle returns to itself and is united, so also in this circular movement the mind returns to itself and becomes one. St Dionysius noted: the movement of the soul is circular; leaving the externals, it enters into itself and unites its spiritual powers in a circular movement that provides a gift of truth.<sup>64</sup>

The two most important phases in Byzantine mysticism (tenth to eleventh century and thirteenth to fourteenth century) bear witness to Dionysius' profound impact on the Byzantine spiritual authors. Some themes were clearly more influential than others. Whereas the presence of the *Divine Names* and the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* is evident in Byzantine spirituality, the *Mystical Theology* is entirely absent from the spiritual works written between the tenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>65</sup> The cases of Niketas Stethatos and Gregory the Sinaite demonstrate that Dionysius' works were regarded as highly important insofar as they describe the process of psychic reversion, the inner union of the soul, the different stages in the spiritual life, the nature of the highest contemplation, and the monks' status within the Church. Dionysius plays a central role in the development of the fourteenth-century theological vocabulary also with regard to more specific issues such as the mind's circular motion and the psychic and bodily prayer techniques.

Interestingly, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* did not influence Byzantine mysticism in all of its historical phases. On the contrary, prior to Niketas Stethatos (eleventh century) the presence of Dionysius in the spiritual authors was either indirect (through Maximus the Confessor) or absent (as in the case of John Climacus). Nevertheless, even in considering Stethatos it must be said that his rediscovery of Dionysius should be seen against the more general background of the reception of earlier spiritual authors such as Isaac the Syrian and pseudo-Macarius the Egyptian. In other words, the renewed interest in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in eleventh-century Byzantium reflects a more general process of rediscovery of the canon of ascetical and spiritual literature. At first, the impact of Dionysius was tremendous, but in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it became less evident and was restricted to specific themes. Finally, we must remember that these authors did not simply read Dionysius through the looking glasses of their predecessors; on the contrary, they accessed the *Corpus Areopagiticum* directly and developed autonomous strategies for understanding the text.

Abbreviations

PG Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne, Lutetia Parisiorum 1857–1866.

PS Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ συγγράμματα, I–VI, ed. P. K. Chrestou and others, Thessaloniki 1962–2016.

Φιλοκαλία Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν νηπτικῶν, I–V, Athens 1974–1976.

## NOTES

1. Hausherr 1936.
2. Meyendorff 1959, 195–200; Meyendorff 1959a, 18–24, 29.
3. Golitzin 1990; Golitzin 1994; Rigo 2004.
4. Rigo 2005.
5. Rigo 2008, XI–CVI.
6. Cf. the scholia of John Italus on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Rigo 2006.
7. Horujy 2004, 319–322; [http://www.danuvius.orthodoxy.ru/Nic\\_Step.htm](http://www.danuvius.orthodoxy.ru/Nic_Step.htm).
8. J. Koder in Koder, Paramelle 1969, 53–64.
9. Rigo 2004, 386–390.
10. Φιλοκαλία, III, 273–355.
11. Chapters, III, 42–44: 336–337.
12. Chapters, III, 34, 35: 334.
13. Chapters, III, 16–18, 26, 29, 32, 48: 330, 332–333, 338.
14. Darrouzès 1961.
15. 6, ll. 8–9: 306.
16. 7, ll. 2–3; 15, ll. 9–10; 21: 308, 318, 324.
17. Gouillard 1939; Peters 2011.
18. Book I: Φιλοκαλία, III, 110, ll. 23–27.
19. Niketas Stethatos, On hierarchy, 36, 38: 338, 340.
20. Niketas Stethatos, On hierarchy, 17–18: 320–322.
21. Cf. Rigo 2002.
22. PG 3–4, with the Dionysius' works.
23. Nicephorus Gregoras, Byzantine History, 19, 1: ed. Schopen, Bonn, II, 923.
24. Cf. Denkova, Yaneva, Ivanova 2000.
25. Cf. e.g. Acrostic chapters, 42, 127: Φιλοκαλία, IV, 37, 58.
26. Rigo 2005, 2–18.
27. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 5: Rigo 2005, 6.
28. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 1: Rigo 2005, 2.
29. Homily on the Transfiguration, 3–4: Balfour 1982, 22.
30. Acrostic chapters, 43: Φιλοκαλία, IV, 37; cf. 112: 51; 7: 31–32.
31. Rigo 2005, LXX–LXXIII.
32. Rigo 2021.
33. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 7: Rigo 2005, 8–10.
34. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 2: Rigo 2005, 2–4.
35. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 6: Rigo 2005, 8.
36. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 7: Rigo 2005, 8–10.
37. Acrostic chapters, 111: Φιλοκαλία, IV, 51.
38. Rigo 2005, XLIII–XLVIII etc.
39. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 1: Rigo 2005, 2.
40. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 10: Rigo 2005, 12.
41. Chapters on the four hierarchies, 7: Rigo 2005, 8–10.
42. On Dionysius' view on monasticism, see Roques 1954, 187–191, 284–286; Roques 1961.
43. EH VI, 2, 5: 117–118, 119.
44. EH VI, 1: p. 117; cf. 116.
45. Ep. VIII, 1: 175–176 and 176–177.

46. Ep. VIII, 4: 183–184.
47. Darrouzès 1987.
48. PG 106, 1373C.
49. Sykoutris 1930, 25; Darrouzès 1966, 371, 384, 390.
50. Answers to Gabriel of Pentapolis, 33: PG 155, 881C–884A.
51. Rigo 2005, LXX.
52. DN IV, 9: CD, II, 153, ll. 10–16 (trans. Rorem)
53. Cf. Lamberz 2006, 248–276.
54. Chapters, III, 29: Φιλοκαλία, III, 332–333.
55. Paidas 2013, 13–29.
56. On the Four Cardinal Virtues and on the Monastic Institution, 7: Paidas 2016, 345.
57. Sinkewicz 2002; Knežević 2012.
58. PS v, 157–159.
59. On the psychosomatic methods Rigo 2002, 92–116.
60. Triads I, 2, 5: PS I, 398.
61. Triads, I, 2, 8: PS I, 400–401; cf. also I, 2, 7: 399–400.
62. Rigo 2011.
63. Method and canon, 70: Φιλοκαλία, IV, 265–266.
64. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain 1801, 158–160 (trans. P. A. Chamberas).
65. As far as we know, the only use of mystical theology in an ascetic–spiritual context is that of the aforementioned Callistus and Ignatius Xanthopouloi, in a passage where they also quote *Letter 5*: “This spiritual, supernatural pleasure and gushing source of life is mystically called enhypostatic enlightenment, super-bright darkness, extraordinary beauty, summit of desires, vision, vision of God and deification. It remains inexpressible even after being expressed in some way, remains unknown after being known, remains inconceivable after being thought of. The great Dionysius says: ‘In this way we pray that super-bright darkness comes and that we, through blindness and ignorance, see and know the One who is above vision and knowledge, the One who in truth is not seen and is not known, and whom we extol in a supra-substantial way, that is, by the stripping of all entities, the One who is supra-substantial’. Again: ‘Divine darkness is the inaccessible light in which, it is said, God dwells. Invisible for its supra-eminent splendour and inaccessible for its excessive outpouring of supra-substantial light. In this darkness is found whoever is made worthy to know and see God, and with this not seeing and not knowing finds himself above vision and knowledge, knowing this: that He is after all things sensitive and intelligible”, Method and canon, 76: Φιλοκαλία, IV, 271–272; for the sources of the chapter on Dionysius cf. Rigo 2011, 417.

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## CHAPTER 18

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# GREGORY PALAMAS AND DIONYSIUS

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TORSTEIN THEODOR TOLLEFSEN

St Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359) was an important Byzantine thinker who utilized the Dionysian legacy in the development of his own theology. Gregory is known for his defence of a particular kind of spirituality in the so-called hesychast controversy of the fourteenth century. He was born of an aristocratic family in Constantinople and as a young man he entered the monastic life at Mount Athos where he learned the practice of hesychast prayer. The monk Barlaam of Calabria (c. 1290–1348) who came to Constantinople was deeply distressed when he learned that the light experienced by the hesychast monks during prayer was claimed to be a direct communication of uncreated, divine light. Gregory's defence of this kind of spirituality brought him into controversy with Barlaam. Gregory's views were supported by local synods in Constantinople. Central in the controversy was the issue of what exactly the hesychast monk had access to in his experience of light, that is whether this light was of a created or of an uncreated nature, and if uncreated, what kind of ontological status it could have. Gregory argued that the light was uncreated and divine, but not that it was the same as the essence of God. He made a distinction between essence (οὐσία) and activity or actualization (ἐνέργεια) that has been central in all later so-called Palamite theology. The divine essence is unparticipable while the activity is participable. This doctrine has become known, especially since the twentieth-century renaissance of Palamite thought, as the doctrine of a real distinction between the essence and energies of God. The term ἐνέργεια has usually been translated with the rather unhappy term 'energy'. John Meyendorff puts it the following way:

The distinction—a real distinction—between divine 'essence' and divine 'energy' is made unavoidable in the context of the doctrine of 'deification', which implies a 'participation' of created man in the uncreated life of God, whose essence remains transcendent and totally unparticipable.<sup>1</sup>

Meyendorff (1926–1992) was a major figure in the ‘Palamite renaissance.’ He made a critical edition with translation of one of the main works by Gregory Palamas, namely the *Triads*.<sup>2</sup> Meyendorff also published a monograph on Palamas, originally in French, later translated into English: *A Study of Gregory Palamas*.<sup>3</sup> His interpretation of Palamite material became very influential in later scholarship. The term ‘real distinction’ was taken over, discussed, and criticized by later scholars.<sup>4</sup> The present author is not so sure that a real distinction between God’s ‘essence and energies’ is ‘made unavoidable’ in principle because of creaturely participation in God since, according to Maximus the Confessor, created and uncreated nature cannot merge, either on the level of essence or on the level of ‘energy.’<sup>5</sup> Whether or not the term *real* reasonably belongs to the description of this distinction is a matter for discussion.<sup>6</sup> The present essay will return to this below, however, the primary aim here is to shed some light on the Dionysian influence on Gregory. This essay argues that there is such an influence in at least two aspects of his thought: on (a) his ontological doctrine of οὐσία and ἐνέργεια in God; and on (b) his ideas of the mystical experience as such.

## GREGORY AND DIONYSIUS

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Dionysius is a major authority for Gregory and he is often referred to as the great Dionysius. However, what should we mean when talking of Dionysian influence on Gregory? Talk of influence may obscure the fact that major thinkers think and are not just repeating what others have said. Gregory’s theology is worked out in the heat of controversy and does not result from leisure. However, it is something of a virtue for him to think in accordance with a certain tradition, and he is obviously convinced that what he brings forward is traditional and no innovation. When he appeals to major authorities such as Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, (Pseudo-) Macarius, Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus we cannot simply take it for granted a priori that he presents their doctrines the way they themselves intended a particular text to be understood. Gregory applies texts to substantiate what he himself considers to be true and that is what determines his selections. However, and this is the other side of the matter, there is no obvious attempt to force pieces of doctrine together eclectically, rather on the background of his own conviction and experience he appeals to those thinkers who have been formative for his mind during his education and monastic training. He moves as an ‘insider’ in familiar terrain and sees himself as a spokesman for a tradition. Dionysius the Areopagite, for instance, is a kindred mind on whose great authority he may lean and with whom he feels free to theologize or philosophize since he is convinced that they are in the same traditional orbit. However, the practical reality is that Gregory feels free to interpret Dionysian texts in a way that suits his own concerns.



## ESSENCE AND ACTIVITY

The author of this essay prefers to translate οὐσία as 'essence' and ἐνέργεια as 'activity'. (For reasons he puts forward in his book *Activity and Participation* (2012) he avoids the term 'energy'.) Some hesychast monks enter a condition in which they experience light. As noted earlier, the hesychasts and Gregory claim this light to be uncreated and divine. Gregory stresses again and again that such a light experience is possible if we make certain distinctions concerning God. It is quite obvious that the Dionysian writings serve him well when he develops these topics. Dionysius presents God as the *unparticipated cause* (ὁ ἀμέθεκτος αἴτιος) that can only be participated in if he acts 'outside of' himself.<sup>7</sup> Gregory picks up this terminology and says that God is unparticipated by essence.<sup>8</sup> There is therefore no possibility of participating in God's essence and, Gregory continues: '[ ... ] it follows that those deemed worthy of union with God are united to God in activity and that the spirit whereby he who clings to God is one with God is called and is indeed the uncreated activity of the Spirit and not the essence of God [ ... ]'.

In his *Capita 150* Gregory describes the divinity in Dionysian terms: God is the supreme mind, the highest good, the nature beyond life and divinity (ἡ ὑπέρζωος καὶ ὑπέρθεος φύσις).<sup>9</sup> In Dionysius' *De divinis nominibus* these terms turn up in a list that comprises several such terms for divine transcendence: τὸ ὑπεράγαθον, τὸ ὑπέρθεον, τὸ ὑπερούσιον, τὸ ὑπέρζων. This essay avoids translating these terms as 'super-good' etc., since that may create the impression that God is conceived of as the maximum on a scale of perfections. The whole point of this ὑπέρ terminology in Dionysius and Gregory is to stress that God is beyond all that may be predicated of beings.

Gregory says further in the same chapter of the *Capita 150* that God is essential goodness and as such even a goodness that transcends goodness. There seems to be no apophatic denial here of God as essential goodness, but when this essential goodness is said to transcend goodness we should probably understand it to mean that there is a distinction between the goodness of the unparticipated cause in itself, being beyond (ὑπέρ) our grasp, and the divine goodness *qua* participated by creatures. According to Gregory, God is not only goodness, he is also life and wisdom. Life and wisdom are, however, reduced to goodness. They are forms of goodness. On the highest metaphysical level in God there is no distinction between life, wisdom, goodness, and the like (καὶ τῶν τοιούτων): 'for that goodness embraces all things collectively, unitively and in utter simplicity' (πάντα γὰρ ἡ ἀγαθότης ἐκείνη συνειλημμένως καὶ ἐνιαίως καὶ ἀπλουστάτως συμπεριβάλλει). This understanding of diverse properties as forms of goodness is in all probability based on Dionysius.<sup>10</sup> It probably echoes Dionysius' denial that 'the good is one thing, being another, and life is other than wisdom'.<sup>11</sup> Dionysius says further that there are not many causes, rather the 'good processions and names of God, celebrated by us, are of one God'. The term 'goodness' makes known the complete providence of the one God, while the other terms point to his more universal and particular providences. The divine name 'good' makes known the totality of the divine processions (προόδους)

and extends to beings and non-beings.<sup>12</sup> One may of course wonder what these non-beings are. Goodness, obviously, embraces all manifested perfections like those mentioned above: being, life, and wisdom. The procession of 'being' is more restricted than goodness since it obviously extends to beings only. 'Life' is restricted to living things, and 'wisdom' to rational things. So goodness as an ontological fact comprises being, being comprises life, and life comprises wisdom. Whatever procession there might be, it is included in a series that in the downward direction is a pluralization and specification while in the upward direction is a unification and simplification. A human being, for instance, participates hierarchically in goodness, being, life, and wisdom. On the other hand (in the upward direction), wisdom is a kind of life, life is a kind of being, and being is a kind of goodness. Diversification occurs in God's relation to creatures or, to be more precise, in the relation of creatures to God. Every procession is a manifestation of the basic divine goodness.

In both thinkers there is a distinction between the essential and absolutely transcendent goodness, and goodness as it is revealed ontologically and epistemologically in a manifestation 'outside' of the divine essence. In Dionysius as well as in Gregory the terminology of processions from the transcendent essence of God invite the interpreter to apply the metaphor of 'outside' even if metaphysically speaking there is nothing 'outside' of God. This inside–outside dynamic reminds one of an important distinction in early Neoplatonism, namely Plotinus' distinction between the internal and external activities of the hypostases of his hierarchical system.<sup>13</sup> This scheme of so-called double activity is essentially a concept of causality. The internal activity is the 'remaining' of an entity in itself, so to say its dwelling in its own inner perfect activity or actuality. This internal activity has as its concomitant an external activity that goes out towards the next level of the hierarchy, and thereby the 'outside' or, more precisely, 'otherness' is established. The external activity would not take place without the internal. The internal activity is, to speak metaphorically, a kind of potent richness of being that graciously brims over and gives of itself to the next level. Plotinus applies metaphors in order to highlight this non-temporal and non-spatial event, but such metaphors should not be mistaken for strict philosophical doctrine.

In Proclus' *Elements of Theology* we find something similar in his famous saying that the effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts to it.<sup>14</sup> The Plotinian internal and the external activities are connected and disconnected in a rather subtle way. On the one hand, the effect could not result without the internal activity of the cause, but on the other hand, the effect is still an incidental result of the cause.<sup>15</sup> The reason for the latter is that the cause does not have the effect in mind as something willed as such. In other words we may say that since God is such and such by nature, a natural result ensues that God does not have to will since it belongs naturally to the divine being. This Neoplatonic structure may help us understand Dionysius' and Gregory's Christian conception of God as essence and God as active.

Gregory obviously found Dionysius' theology very useful when he developed his doctrine of divine essence and activity. Gregory's terminology for that which should be distinguished from the divine essence is quite rich. He talks for instance of activity,

power, glory, splendour, light, and grace. God, he says, remains entirely in himself (ὅλου μένοντος ἐν ἑαυτῷ)—this notion of remaining is probably of Neoplatonic and of Dionysian provenance—and dwells also entirely in us by his superessential power.<sup>16</sup> What is communicated to us is not the divine nature, but the divine glory and splendour. But the communication is somehow based on the ‘internal’ being of God. This implies that the essential goodness is the foundation of the external goodness, and here as well as in the case of Neoplatonism there is connection and disconnection involved: the manifested goodness and all it includes, all processions or external activities, is a manifestation of what God is, even if God’s essence is hidden ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ what is manifested. The processions or activities are in a sense natural. They make *kataphatic* theology possible, but what is hidden ‘behind’ the manifestation is *apophatically* unknowable for any created intellect.

Dionysius often uses a terminology that seems somehow to reify what he calls divine procession or processions (πρόοδος and πρόοδοι). The fifth chapter of the *Divine Names* is quite typical in this regard. The processions are not ‘things’ or independent entities. Against misunderstandings Dionysius clarifies his position when he says that processions such as Goodness, Being, Life, and Wisdom are not separate divinities mediating between God and creatures.<sup>17</sup> There is one God that manifests all these processions. Gregory adapts Dionysian ways of formulating the divine activities. In the *Triads*, for instance, he quotes Dionysius second letter to Gaius, concerning the term ‘divinity’ (θεότης).<sup>18</sup> According to Dionysius, this term denotes the ‘the god-making gift that deifies us’ and not God himself. God is beyond his processions or activities. Such terminology, however, provoked critique against Gregory and he was accused for just what Dionysius tried to avoid, namely making his divine ἐνέργεια into a separate and second divinity. In a letter to Akindynus, one of his opponents, Gregory used the phrase ‘lower divinity’ (θεότης ὑφειμένη) about the divine activity.<sup>19</sup> On a Dionysian background it should be no need to misunderstand such a saying and in a second version of the letter Gregory specified the term, appealing to the authority of Dionysius.

St John of Damascus provides Gregory with a lot more dynamic ways of formulating the phenomenon of activity. He is referred to as a source in *Capita 150*, chapter 143:<sup>20</sup> ‘Activity and capacity for activity are different. For activity is the essential motion of nature. Nature possesses the capacity for activity from which the activity proceeds.’ On this background it gives good sense when Gregory in *Capita 150*, chapter 137, quite dynamically says that God foreknows, provides, creates, preserves, rules, and transforms creatures (προγινώσκει, προνοεῖται, δημιουργεῖ, συντηρεῖ, δεσπόζει, μετασκευάζει). In the *Triads* he quotes Dionysius and says that the activities are certain powers (δύναμεις) that are deifying, essence-making, life-giving, and giving wisdom (ἐκθεωτικὰς ἢ οὐσιοποιοὺς ἢ ζωογόνους ἢ σοφοδῶρους).<sup>21</sup>

If the divine ἐνέργεια is understood in this way, it might be suggested that it is similar if not identical with the Aristotelian second activity or the Plotinian external activity. However, it seems to me a bit strange to say with Meyendorff that such an activity is really distinct from the essence. Of course, being a rational animal differs from building, thinking, teaching etc., but it is a bit curious if it should be claimed that building,

thinking, and teaching are really distinct ontologically from being a rational animal. We do not think Meyendorff's real distinction between essence and 'energies' in God is what is needed in order to secure divine transcendence and unparticipability. What has to be recognized is that even if divine activities are participated in, creatures do not admit of a change into divine activity. It is in this connection that we think Gregory's saying about becoming light in our next section needs serious consideration. The natures with their natural activities are preserved and there is no transformation of what is creaturely into the divine or of the divine into what is creaturely. Modern theology has tried to think deification from the point of view of Meyendorff's real distinction, but maybe that is a wrong way to proceed? Deification is still shrouded in mystery and any ontological analysis of it seems so far to end up with the result that there is no real deification, since the two spheres—the uncreated and the created—cannot really melt together. It seems that the question 'what is deification?' needs to be rethought once more. Maybe, as we have suggested in another connection, metaphors are better suited to express this mystery.<sup>22</sup>

In *Ambiguum* 5 Maximus the Confessor says:

For it is just like the way the cutting-edge of a sword plunged in fire becomes burning hot and the heat acquires a cutting-edge (for just as the fire is united to the iron, so also is the burning heat of the fire to the cutting-edge of the iron, and the iron becomes burning hot by its union with the fire, and the fire acquires a cutting-edge by union with the iron). Neither suffers any change by the exchange with the other in union, but each remains unchanged in its own being as it acquires the property of its partner in union.<sup>23</sup>

It is at least profitable to meditate a bit on this metaphor. Even if the sword is one thing, iron and fire are two natures and have two different activities. When put into the furnace, iron actually becomes something it was not before. It becomes intensely yellow-white with an almost transparent nature. From the point of view of the observer it might be asked if this is still really iron? In addition, from the point of view of the observer what is actually seen is even one and only one thing. One may, of course, say that iron and fire can be distinguished, but probably only conceptually.

It is quite obvious that Gregory has integrated Dionysian insights into his doctrine of essence and activity, a doctrine that has a practical aspect since it is designed to highlight the character of the mystical experience.

## THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

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We turn to the mystical experience as such. Gregory makes it quite clear in his *Triads* that he considers *apophatic* and *cataphatic* theology as a pursuit purely based on natural human capacities, while the mystical experience, on the other hand, is beyond the human intellect.<sup>24</sup> Dionysius talks of 'that which is above all affirmation and

abstraction'.<sup>25</sup> Gregory says God 'is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond unknowing', which accords well with the opening of Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* where he uses the term ὑπεράγνωστον, 'beyond-unknowing', to qualify the summit of ascent.<sup>26</sup> Gregory, however, has the tendency to talk of the hesychast experience in terms of knowledge and contemplation, but he again and again qualifies such terminology, also by quoting 'the great Dionysius' who says the union of the deified person with the divine light takes place by the cessation of every intellectual activity (κατὰ πάσης νοεράς ἐνεργείας ἀπόπαυσιν).<sup>27</sup> Gregory qualifies his knowledge terminology in accordance with, once more, 'the great Dionysius', and finds it more proper to talk of union with God than of knowledge of God.<sup>28</sup>

In the most interesting part of Gregory's spiritual psychology, if we may use such a term, the latter draws heavily on both (Pseudo-) Macarius and Dionysius in his presentation. Gregory says:

Can you not see, then, how essential it is that those who have determined to pay attention to themselves in inner quiet (ἡσυχία) should withdraw and enclose (ἐπανάγειν καὶ ἐμπερικλείειν) the intellect in the body, and especially in that body most interior to the body, which we call the heart?<sup>29</sup>

Gregory's immediate source for this is (Pseudo-) Macarius (fourth/fifth century), who says the heart directs the entire organism.<sup>30</sup> 'For the heart directs and governs all the other organs of the body. And when grace pastures the heart, it rules over all the members and the thoughts. For there, in the heart, the intellect abides as well as all the thoughts of the soul and all its hopes.' The intellect shall, however, not only be withdrawn into the heart, but even into itself.<sup>31</sup> For the formulation of this motif Gregory seems to be drawing mainly on Dionysian material. In the *Divine Names* Dionysius distinguishes between three movements of the soul, the straight, the circular, and the spiral movement.<sup>32</sup> The straight movement is the advancement to things around the soul, and from these things it is conducted from symbols to simple and unified contemplations. The circular movement is the entrance of the soul into itself from things without. This is described as a unified convolution (συνέλιξις) of its intellectual powers as in a sort of circle. In this way the soul collects itself to itself from the many external things and conducts its unified self to the beautiful and the good. The spiral movement is the soul's movement towards the illumination of divine knowledge.

It is the first two that interest Gregory the most.<sup>33</sup> The straight movement is when the soul advances to things around it and is not focused within its own unity. This is a risky activity, as we shall see later. For Dionysius, however, this outward movement is not a bad one, since the advance to external things shall result in a unified contemplation conducted from these things by certain symbols. Gregory sees the circular movement of the soul as the entrance into itself from things without. As we saw earlier, in this connection Dionysius uses a wonderful noun, συνέλιξις, one of the senses of which, according to Lampe, is concentration of spiritual faculties. The verb is συνελίσσω, which means 'roll up', 'roll together (with)'. This is a nice way to describe something as difficult as the phenomenon of self-consciousness that we shall return to later.

For Gregory the mind's movement along a straight line symbolizes the intellect's function in observation of the external world.<sup>34</sup> For him this is not without its dangers since the intellect risks being dispersed in preoccupation with material things. Gregory draws on Basil the Great for the notion of dispersion. The circular movement, Gregory says, is the most excellent and appropriate; in it the intellect is returning upon itself and beholding itself. These two movements are obviously, for Gregory, understood as different kinds of self-consciousness. The straight movement characterizes a false self-consciousness while the circular characterizes true self-consciousness. In other words we can speak of a false and a true image of oneself. This, however, does not seem to match completely with what Dionysius had in mind with the first movement. What is this true self upon which the intellect returns, the self, to use Dionysian terminology, which the intellect is rolled up with? It is the self of myself as the image of God. At this point Gregory immediately introduces a rather surprising notion: in the returning movement the intellect even transcends itself and becomes united with God. How should this be understood? It probably means that when the intellect beholds (ὁρᾷ) itself as an image of God, there is opened up for it a passage to God and it beholds God through itself as an image.<sup>35</sup>

Gregory speaks of becoming beyond oneself (ὕπὲρ ἑαυτὸν γινόμενος):<sup>36</sup> 'The human intellect also, and not only the angelic, transcends itself (ὕπεραναβαίνει δὲ ἑαυτὸν) and by achieving detachment from passions it acquires an angelic form.' In order to characterize this movement Gregory also applies the terminology of ecstasy.<sup>37</sup> We suppose the idea is that true self-consciousness is relational and that self-understanding in the genuine sense is only possible in one's relation to God. Gregory's terminology of ecstasy in this connection is probably Dionysian, since it fits well with what Dionysius says about the relational character of divine love:<sup>38</sup> 'But divine love is ecstatic, not permitting any to be lovers of themselves, but of those beloved' (Ἔστι δὲ ἐκστατικὸς ὁ θεὸς ἔρωσ οὐκ ἑὼν ἑαυτῶν εἶναι τοὺς ἐραστάς, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐρωμένων). Here Dionysius denounces self-love and emphasizes love for 'the other'.

It might be surprising that, according to Gregory, this ecstatic self-transcendence as such is not yet the mystical experience:

This ecstasy is incomparably higher than abstractive theology, for it belongs only to those who have attained detachment from passions. But it is not yet union, unless the Paraclete illumines from on high the man who attains in prayer the stage which is superior to the highest natural possibilities, and who is awaiting the promise of the Father; and by His revelation ravishes him to the contemplation of the light.<sup>39</sup>

The point is obviously that the experience of light is beyond the reach of the exercise of human powers. The light is not achieved by human effort; it is rather given by God. Here we shall also bring the ontological issue of essence and activity into the picture, but first we shall investigate Gregory's understanding of the light experience a bit more. In the *Triads* he gives a striking interpretation of St Paul's mystic experience that is described in 2 Corinthians (12: 1–6).<sup>40</sup> After his rapture (ἄρπαγή) Paul declared his ignorance of what it was. However, Gregory says 'he saw himself' (Εώρα μέντοι ἑαυτόν), but by what



faculty of the soul did he see himself since all powers of the soul were transcended? The answer is that he saw himself by the Spirit who brought about the rapture. Gregory next asks what he was then, since he was inaccessible to every natural power. He answers: 'He was that to which he was united, by which he knew himself, and for which he had detached himself from all else. Such, then, was his union with the light [ ... ]'. Gregory continues:

He consequently was light and spirit, to which he was united, by which he had received the capacity of union, having gone out from all beings, and become light by grace, and non-being by transcendence, that is by exceeding created things.

These sayings are extremely daring, since they seem to indicate that human nature is transformed into something else. Detached from all creatures and, it seems, all creatureliness, the human being becomes light and even achieves the divine attribute of non-being. However, the most daring saying on deification in Gregory is the following:<sup>41</sup> 'Those who attain it become thereby uncreated, unoriginate and uncircumscribed, although in their own nature, they derive from nothingness.' There is, unfortunately, no space to enter into a proper investigation of this saying within the limits of the present essay, so we have to return to the device by which the problems of such challenging and paradoxical ideas are usually solved, namely by the application of the essence-activity distinction.

In *Capita 150* Gregory refers to the circular movement again.<sup>42</sup> He quotes Dionysius from a paragraph in *De divinis nominibus* where the circular and the straight movements describe the movement of 'the divine minds'.<sup>43</sup> Gregory interprets, obviously correctly, these 'divine minds' as the angels. The circular movement is the movements of the good angels towards God, when they are united with 'the illuminations of the good and the beautiful which are without beginning and end.' This, maybe, is at least one clue to interpret Gregory's strong sayings above: the mind is not transformed essentially from creaturely being into divine being. Rather these minds participate in the divine processions or activities that by nature, since they issue from the divinity as such, are uncreated. The human being, particularly the mind, is transformed in the way that its creatureliness is preserved while it exists in a divine mode of activity and for that reason may be characterized by divine attributes.

St Gregory Palamas did not work out a theological system like a university professor. He grasped all the resources he found available in order to defend a living experience among the hesychast monks. With this in view he mustered a whole range of authorities in the Christian tradition, and among these venerable figures he appealed to Dionysius the Areopagite as an authority, he says, next to the Apostles.<sup>44</sup>

## NOTES

1. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (1987), 186.



2. Grégoire Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, 1–2, Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, Jean Meyendorff (1959).
3. *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (1959), *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (1964).
4. There is a critical evaluation of this notion in Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (2012).
5. Cf. Torstein T. Tollefsen, 'Like a Glowing Sword, St Maximus on Deification', in Mark Edwards and Elena Ene D-Vasilescu (eds), *Visions of God and Ideas of Deification in Patristic Thought* (2017), 158–170.
6. Cf. the chapter on Palamas in Tollefsen (2012).
7. *De divinis nominibus* 12.4 in Beate Regina Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum I* (1990), 225–226, hereafter DN. Cf. DN 11.6, 222–223.
8. Saint Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. Robert E. Sinkewicz (1988), hereafter *Capita 150*, chapter 75.
9. *Capita 150*, chapter 34. Cf. Dionysius, DN 2.3, 125.
10. DN 5.1, Suchla (1990), 180–181.
11. DN 5.2, Suchla (1990), 181.
12. DN 5.1, Suchla (1990), 180–181.
13. Cf. the section on Plotinus in Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (2012), 21–31.
14. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, trans., intro., and comm., E. R. Dodds, (1977), proposition 35.
15. Cf. Tollefsen (2012), 23 and 26–27.
16. See the edition of the *Triads* in Grégoire Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, 1–2, Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, Jean Meyendorff (1959), 1.3.23. Hereafter *Triads*.
17. DN 5.2, Suchla (1990), 181.
18. *Triads* 1.3.23; cf. Dionysius, *Letter 2*, in G. Heil und A. M. Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum II* (1991), 158.
19. My source for this is A. C. Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington (1983), xv, note 44–xvi.
20. Cf. John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei* 59.6–9, ed. Kotter (1973). Sinkewicz (1988), who edited and translated Palamas' *Capita 150*, translates ἐνεργητικόν as 'capacity for energy', which I find quite reasonable.
21. *Triads* 3.2.11, cf. Dionysius, DN 2.7, Suchla (1990), 131.
22. Cf. Torstein T. Tollefsen, in Edwards and D-Vasilescu (eds) (2017), 167–168.
23. *Ambiguum* 5, CCGS 48: 33, Louth's translation.
24. Cf. *Triads* 1.3.4.
25. DN 2.4, Suchla (1990), 127.
26. *Mystical Theology* 1.1, Heil and Ritter (1991), 141.
27. *Triads* 1.3.17 and DN 1.5, Suchla (1990), 116.
28. *Triads* 1.3.20.
29. *Triads* 1.2.3.
30. Pseudo-Macarius, *Homily* 15.20, PG 24: 589b, quoted in *Triads* 1.2.3.
31. *Triads* 1.2.4: Ἡμεῖς δέ, μὴ μόνον εἶσω τοῦ σώματος καὶ τῆς καρδίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ πάλιν εἶσω πέμπομεν τὸν νοῦν.
32. DN 4.9, Suchla (1990), 153–154.
33. *Triads* 1.2.5.

- 34. *Triads* 1.2.5.
- 35. Cf. *Triads* 1.2.6.
- 36. Cf. *Triads* 1.2.5 and 1.3.4.
- 37. *Triads* 1.3.21 and 2.3.35.
- 38. DN 4.13, Suchla (1990), 158–159.
- 39. *Triads* 2.3.35.
- 40. *Triads* 2.3.37.
- 41. *Triads* 3.1.31.
- 42. *Capita* 150.65.
- 43. DN 4.8, Suchla (1990), 153.
- 44. *Capita* 150.85.

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## CHAPTER 19

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# PLETHO AND DIONYSIUS

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GEORGIOS STEIRIS

GEORGIOS Gemistos ‘Pletho’ (1355–1454) was the most prominent scholar of fifteenth-century Byzantium.<sup>1</sup> While most Pletho scholars tend to emphasize his debts to Neoplatonism,<sup>2</sup> especially Proclus,<sup>3</sup> they have not devoted enough attention to the relation between Pletho’s texts and the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Chatzimichael contends that a careful reading of Pletho’s texts would reveal hitherto unnoticed affinities with Dionysius’ views, because they were both indebted to Proclus (412–485).<sup>4</sup> Hladký presents Plethonic ontology as compatible with that of the Dionysian one.<sup>5</sup> According to Woodhouse, Pletho’s alleged debts to Dionysian could also be attributed to Neoplatonism.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, Gersh holds that Pletho aspired to a Platonism bereft of Christian influences and, that, as a result, he wished to separate the Zoroastrian from the Dionysian elements in his philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Siniosoglou points out the divergences between Pletho and Dionysius to vindicate his thesis about Pletho’s paganism.<sup>8</sup> This essay attempts to scrutinize the way Pletho addresses the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. It argues that Pletho was originally a political thinker and he gradually evolved into a political philosopher in order to support his political vision. In this endeavour the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was extremely useful for him as he elaborated his political ontotheology.

## PLETHO’S ONTOLOGY AND ITS THEOLOGICAL CONNOTATIONS

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Of particular interest is Pletho’s hierarchical metaphysics. The cosmos is eternal and consists in beings, eternal and mortal, who are offspring of Zeus, the First God, the One beyond essence, the creator, and the supreme cause of everything. He is self-subsistent (αὐθύπαρκτος), self-caused (αὐτοῶν-αὐτοπάτωρ), absolute good (αὐτοαγαθός), father and creator of everything, and perfect and complete unity. Despite his transcendence, he

is knowable by the flower of human intellect, a possible allusion to John's of Scythopolis *Scholia on the Divine Names of Dionysius*, which exceeds rational knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

From Zeus stems a genealogical hierarchy of inferior gods. Firstly, he gives birth to Poseidon and the supracelestial gods. They are divided into legitimate (Olympian gods), who are timeless, and illegitimate (Titans), who are mortal. Poseidon's children are in the third rank of gods. The supracelestial gods are identified with the forms that constitute a united whole in spite of their plurality. The highest form is divided by Zeus and the lower forms are images of the higher. All the forms receive their essence from Zeus. The lower gods are ontologically inferior, while they are images of the higher.<sup>10</sup>

Poseidon, the second intelligible deity, creates the causes of the sensible and is in charge of creation.<sup>11</sup> The forms are identified with deities, according to the late Neoplatonist exemplar, and the complex hierarchies would be more easily comprehensible.<sup>12</sup> Gods' relations are genealogical.<sup>13</sup> The higher forms, the Olympian, are models of the eternal ontological features of the sensible world, while the lower forms, the Titans, serve as the models of mortal things. The gods of the third order are located inside the cosmos. Despite their immanence, they are rational and immortal. There are also the inferior mortal creatures.<sup>14</sup>

Within the lowest ontological level there is a further division between a higher everlasting part and a lower mortal part. The gods of the third order are situated in the higher part of the sensible world and cooperate with the lower forms in order to generate the lower mortal part of the sensible world. The Titans are not able to produce mortal creatures without the cooperation of the Sun, who provides the matter. According to Pletho, there is a sharp distinction between the immutable limited plurality of the intelligible order and the constantly mutable sensible world. Human nature is the point where the higher and lower parts of the universe come into contact.<sup>15</sup> Each self-sufficient form has its distinct position in the hierarchical structured universe, but at the same time it reflects in itself the rest of the forms, because they all proceed from and return to the same principle.<sup>16</sup>

In Pletho's ontotheology, the Platonic forms are not ideas in God's mind—the middle Platonic solution<sup>17</sup>—but they are separate, although ontologically inferior, hypostases caused by a superessential One.<sup>18</sup> The existence of multiple gods is the only way to bridge the gap between transcendence and immanence. Pletho seeks to avoid a homogenous polytheism, because it would result in a non-hierarchical reality, celestial and earthly. His monotheism is polytheistic because, while he concedes that there are a lot of deities, he firmly declares that Zeus is their common cause and matrix.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noticing that Pletho's ontology is not presented for the first time in his *Laws*. In *The Brief Clarification of What is Said in These Oracles Less Clearly* he outlines a very similar metaphysical hierarchy.<sup>20</sup>

In Pletho's cosmos everything is caused by a certain and fixed cause. Hemarmene (Εἰμαρμένη) ordains everything in an absolute manner.<sup>21</sup> All the events are predestined by God and there is no possibility for spontaneous or autonomous creation.<sup>22</sup> Zeus is not subject to Heimarmene.<sup>23</sup> Pletho's determinism is reinforced by the fact that matter proceeds from Hera and as a result it has a cause.<sup>24</sup> In Pletho's universe, humans are and are not free at the same time. He fervently argues that necessity does not abolish nor

does it override human freedom,<sup>25</sup> although humans have a fixed role and ought to act according to their nature, which is proximate to God's.<sup>26</sup>

Pletho's ontotheology is also the basis of his ethics. He claims that man's goal is happiness. Its pursuit requires sound knowledge of what happiness is and of what it consists. In turn, this endeavour requires thorough knowledge of human nature, which in turn requires a good understanding of the nature of reality.<sup>27</sup> Zeus himself is the source of virtue and the eternal moral archetype. Humans should exceed their nature, discard their deficiencies, and assimilate or imitate God, who is absolute Goodness.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, cult and religious beliefs are of vital importance for Pletho. The rituals and prayers are conducted publicly, under the guidance of a priest or a public official. Public cult contributes to the amelioration of the participants.<sup>29</sup> Pletho argues that there are three fundamental religious doctrines that prevail above all others: God is one and absolute perfection; he governs the universe and his providence aims at the human good; and finally, he rules justly and is unaffected by the prayers and the gifts of the faithful, because he does not have any needs.<sup>30</sup> Pletho contends that if the aforementioned views are accepted by citizens, all men would be genuinely moral and seek the true good. On the contrary, every evil is the outcome of perverted beliefs about the divine.<sup>31</sup> Pletho's public cult aims to reconstruct political society and enhance the bonds that unite its members.<sup>32</sup>

Although scholarship sought to locate Pletho's sources predominantly in Plato and pagan Neoplatonism,<sup>33</sup> this essay argues that we would trace Dionysian influences in Pletho's thought.

Pletho believes that the First God is one being. His predilection brings him closer to Dionysius' Christianity instead of any pagan Neoplatonist.<sup>34</sup> Pletho approximates Philo Alexandrinus (end of the first century BCE and the middle of the first century CE) and Dionysius: the form is not the *ὄντως ὄν*. The *ὄντως ὄν* is transformed by Pletho to *ὁ ὄντως ὤν* (Zeus), the superessential One.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, Pletho's belief in the existence of natures superior to humans, who are intermediaries between God and man, would be interpreted as an expression of his acceptance of Dionysius' divine hierarchies.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the terms and conceptual categories employed by Pletho to describe Zeus bring him close to the tradition of negative theology. Since the One is absolute unity, identity, and self-subsistence, it cannot be expressed cataphatically in imperfect human language. It could not be known or spoken. Dionysius, besides Plotinus, (204/5–270) and Proclus, developed both positive and negative theological approaches, as did Pletho.<sup>37</sup> At the same time Pletho prefers to incorporate Greek mythology in his ontology because it allowed him to genealogically connect all the levels of reality.<sup>38</sup> Angelic orders, like these of Dionysius, would not permit such strong connections. Furthermore, Hankins holds that, in fourteen-century Byzantium, the conservative Orthodox who were attached to the Greek Orthodox ideal of late antiquity, felt consternation and discomfort over hesychasm and alienation from contemporary Orthodoxy. These people thought that Dionysian theology could contribute to the unity among the Orthodox and would have influenced Pletho.<sup>39</sup> Woodhouse, however, maintains that there is no

great difference between Dionysius and Pletho in their incorporation of Neoplatonic theology, especially that of Proclus.<sup>40</sup>

Siniooglou, in his attempt to present Pletho's thought as alien to Dionysius', claims that Pletho's God is not beyond being, since he is knowable.<sup>41</sup> But this interpretation is not accurate. Plato's Good is also knowable and beyond being the same time. In addition, according to Siniooglou, Pletho's Zeus is not superessential in the full sense, because he is being. He is not a superessential agent beyond being and non-being, as the Orthodox and Proclus hold.<sup>42</sup> Siniooglou fails to understand that Dionysius' God provides existence. According to Dionysius, God is superessentially existent and bestows existence upon all things that exist, and brings the world into being.<sup>43</sup> Beings are God's images and their hierarchy depends on their purity and transparency. Furthermore, it is important to note that Pletho's Zeus generates beings that participate in God's essence because their relation to Zeus is genealogical and participatory. Pletho's forms, unlike Plato's, are persons.

Siniooglou also holds that, although Pletho calls God *ὑπερούσιος*, his approach is different from Dionysius' understanding of the divine as beyond being and essence. Pletho's Zeus is superessential because he does not permit any distinction between essence, energy, and potentiality.<sup>44</sup> We support the view that Pletho's Zeus is rather a *causa perfecta*, since it combines all the four Aristotelian causes. Later in his book, Siniooglou modifies his view and stresses that Pletho's Zeus is beyond being regarding its unqualified modality of being and its causal priority over forms. Zeus is not truly beyond being: is *ὄν*, *ἐν καὶ ἀγαθός*, hence within being.<sup>45</sup> However, Pletho's Zeus is predominantly that which he is, *ὁ ὦν*. He is being *simpliciter* and other intelligibles partake in his being. Zeus is self-engendered, in absolute simplicity, the essence of the good, being in itself, good in itself that confers being on the rest of the ontological hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> Zeus is not really beyond being in the sense of Dionysius. The latter's One is beyond mind and being.<sup>47</sup>

For his part, Hladký holds that the wording Pletho uses in order to describe Zeus brings him close to the Platonic tradition of negative theology. Although he maintains that the Plethonian God is superessential, he accepts that he is also being.<sup>48</sup> However, Hladký refrains from mentioning that Pletho's Zeus is co-substantial with creatures, a position that is not compatible with the Dionysian tradition. Furthermore, in Pletho's ontological scheme there is no Demiurge, a crucial point for Christian Platonism.

Recently, Gersh contended that Pletho aspired to a Platonism free of Christian influences and as a result he wished to separate the Zoroastrian from the Dionysian elements in his philosophy.<sup>49</sup> As far as we can tell, there is no reference in Pletho's texts that would prove the validity of Gersh's argument. On the contrary, the amalgamation of Neoplatonic and Christian elements indicates that Pletho was not bothered at all.

Couloubaritsis accurately notes that Pletho's God is both transcendent and immanent. The emanating divine Ideas are separate from God, the creative cause. Pletho distinguishes between the One and gods. While Plato's and Dionysius' One is transcendent, Pletho's is both immanent and transcendent. As a consequence, Pletho's

ontotheology, although it does not follow the Greek polytheistic exemplar, is neither monotheistic in the Christian sense.<sup>50</sup> Pletho's polytheism has to address the pressing problem of the relation of the one and the many, since he opted to eliminate any kind of polyarchy from his political perspective. Even the triadic nature of the Christian God would be a form of polyarchy, according to Pletho. Since the triadic structure of the Christian God presupposes essential identity, the distribution of powers should be accurate.<sup>51</sup>

That is the reason why Pletho refused the *Filioque* in the *Reply in Support of the Latins* (1449), a treatise directed against the work of Ioannes Argyropoulos (c. 1405–1487): the Son should not produce the Holy Spirit, because in such a case Pletho would be obliged to accept intermediary creative causes, besides the one God.<sup>52</sup> Pletho's *Reply* has a political overtone, since he aims for the safeguarding of the *yévoç* and not of the Orthodox dogma.<sup>53</sup>

Namely, Argyropoulos contends that things with different potentialities must have different essences. According to Pletho, Argyropoulos reproduces pagan theology. Pletho then describes roughly what a Hellenic theology is: firstly, an uppermost God with a plurality of offspring, who are ontologically inferior to their Father because they owe their existence to him. As a consequence, Argyropoulos' position leads to the conclusion that the Father and the Son have different essences, because the Son should exist through the Father. Pletho contends that there are three different persons in the Holy Trinity, distinguished by their properties, but one essence. The property of having been caused belongs to the Son—by generation—and the Spirit—by procession. The Holy Spirit is different from its cause and is produced not by the Father and the Son, because in such a case the first two persons coalesce and we should refer to a Holy Dyad. If the Son takes part in the production of the Holy Spirit, the result would be a Holy Tetrad. Pletho supports that he establishes his argument on Dionysius the Areopagite, who is among the main theologians of the Orthodox Church, including John of Damascus (675–749), Justin the Martyr (c. 100–165), Gregory of Nazianzus (330–389), Cyril of Alexandria (c. 375–444), and Theodoret (c. 393–458/466).<sup>54</sup> Pletho defends the Orthodox position against the Latin Church because he understands that the *Filioque* renders the Son in the same place with the Father, a position that undermines his political ontotheology.

Pletho's *Reply* to Argyropoulos also highlights his attitude towards the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Pletho's alleged debts to Dionysius could also be credited to Neoplatonism: the hierarchy of beings, the assimilation with the Divine, the soul's advance to the light, the placement of the Ideas in the mind of God.<sup>55</sup> Despite Woodhouse's views, we have to bear in mind that Pletho's God is transcendental, but also personal, something that brings him closer to Dionysius than the pagan Neoplatonists. Pletho situates deities between God and man, as Dionysius. Consequently, some of the Pletho's alleged debts to Neoplatonism would be also credited to Dionysius.

In addition, Pletho's *Prayer to One God* bears a strong resemblance to Dionysius' apophatic approach.<sup>56</sup> The text presents a kind of negative theological counterpart to the numerous affirmative theological prayers in the *Laws*, although the actual



negations are applied to terms that are not common in either Proclus or Dionysius. Indicative of his possible sources is the fact that Pletho uses the rather rare phrase 'unsearchable, unfathomable and ineffable is the ocean of thy goodness'.<sup>57</sup> It is likely that he draws from John Chrysostom (347–407),<sup>58</sup> John of Damascus (675–749),<sup>59</sup> and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662).<sup>60</sup> In the *Magian Oracles* Pletho also ventures in negativity.

Pletho's religion is philosophical, without denying the importance of public cult. Zografides supports that Pletho's political philosophy is a Byzantine variant of Platonic and Hellenistic political theory, which is premised on the presumption that the king is an imitation of God and the earthly polity is an image of Zeus' absolute power.<sup>61</sup> Surprisingly enough, Zografides and other modern scholars overlook Dionysius's *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, where the earthly ecclesiastical hierarchy reflects the celestial.

## PLETHO'S POLITICAL ONTOTHEOLOGY

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According to Siniosoglou, Pletho, predominantly in the *Laws*, introduces a political religion.<sup>62</sup> This essay argues that his endeavour is much more complex. His shift towards philosophy marked his late years, when he probably realized that his political views, expressed schematically in his early memoranda, required a firm ontological substratum. It was not an innovation for a philosopher in the long Platonic tradition to combine ontology and political philosophy. Pletho's philosophy is an attempt to articulate a concrete political ontotheology, since it presupposes a concise metaphysical order, which is rational, enriched with theological and religious insights.<sup>63</sup>

Pletho states that his supreme merit is a polity similar to that of Sparta, but with the elimination of rigour and its replacement by philosophy.<sup>64</sup> His work treats the laws and the best constitution so as to assist people in the pursuit of happiness.<sup>65</sup> Humans ought to behave in ways that promote the common good and the salvation of humanity, because this behaviour is God's will.<sup>66</sup> Therefore the origin of morality is ontological.<sup>67</sup>

Pletho's model society is hierarchically ordered and divided in three *γένη*:<sup>68</sup> the self-sufficient producers (*αὐτουργικόν*), the suppliers of services (*διακονικόν*), and the ruling (*ἀρχικόν*). The first *γένος* consists of those who earn income from agricultural activities. Merchants, craftsmen, and mercenaries belong to the middle one. The ruling *γένος* are judges, princes, and army officers.<sup>69</sup> Above all stands the absolute monarch,<sup>70</sup> who should be advised by a group of wise men. We agree with Nikolaidou that Pletho prefers monarchy because it resembles his ontology and not because of his dependence to Plato. Furthermore, Pletho's ontology reflects the Byzantine concept of *Imperium Romanorum*, according to which Zeus is the *pater familias* of all the monarchs in earth and all the members of the cosmopolis are interrelated, in a complex hierarchical and genealogical system.<sup>71</sup> Pletho, in *On Virtues*, holds that justice is the cardinal virtue and

determines each person's position in the hierarchical universe. Civil life and proper morality lead humans to assimilate higher beings and rise up the cosmic hierarchy.<sup>72</sup>

According to Pletho, human societies, in order to flourish, should imitate the divine prototype, the cosmic order.<sup>73</sup> This is an argument akin to the Dionysian correspondence between celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy. The political society stems from God's will, because the universe is in fact a well-organized political society. The rational beings, besides being members of the same society, are genealogically interrelated; they consist of the perfect city,<sup>74</sup> which should be the mirror image of the heavenly city, just as sensible reality is the reflections of the intelligible world. God endowed every human with certain qualities that posit him in a certain place in the sociopolitical hierarchy.<sup>75</sup> His role in each society varies, but he is obliged to obey God.<sup>76</sup> Pletho's innovation is that the correlation between the earthly and heavenly cities is used as a way to advance the human condition.<sup>77</sup>

We argue that the key texts to understanding Pletho's debts to Dionysius are the two Hierarchies, the *Celestial* and the *Ecclesiastical*. Dionysius describes a Christian hierarchical ontology, especially in his *Celestial Hierarchy*, and its earthly image in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.<sup>78</sup> According to Dionysius, the created universe is an image of ordinance and harmony, an idea of divine peace. Cosmical hierarchy is the path to God, as an assimilation to Him and finally as a *henosis*. The function of each being and its placement in the hierarchy depends on its closeness to God, who is everything in everything, but not equal to all. As such, all beings are related to each other and their fullness accomplishes the divine providence. The ascent of lower beings towards God is mediated by higher ones. In the Dionysian hierarchy angels are above humans. The angelic orders are also hierarchically organized according to their mystical knowledge of God. The hierarchy is immutable and each order is the interpreter of the higher. There is no direct contact between lower beings and God. As the final goal is *theosis*, the pathway to God passes through the Holy Service and the ecclesiastical mysteries. The Church is divided into two triple circles and is the image of the celestial hierarchy. In the Church there is also a hierarchy which depends on the level of initiation to the Christian mysteries.

In his political treatises Pletho constructs complex hierarchies, which resemble the Dionysian *Ecclesiastical* and *Celestial Hierarchy*. Pletho differentiates himself from previous Byzantine political thinkers who insisted on land control, and focuses instead on a new theory of power which is based on people's organization and control, according to the Dionysian exemplar.

The tripartite division of society, according to a natural exemplar, was common among late antique and early Christian thinkers. Dionysius' eponymous celestial hierarchy consists in three triads of angels. Its earthly image, the Church, consists in triads that roughly correspond to Pletho's division of society. The Patriarch, as Pletho's monarch, rules the Church. We partly agree with Smarnakes, who supports that Pletho's main source was Dionysius. Partly, because he claims that Pletho's inspiration was indirect and mediated through Latin sources.<sup>79</sup> Smarnakes disregards Pletho's knowledge of *Corpus Dionysiacum*.

## CONCLUSIONS

Pletho followed in the path of thinkers in the long Platonic tradition who argued that politics exceeds philosophy, theology, and religion separately. He was persuaded that politics should be established on true philosophy and mirrors the cosmic order. Pletho interpreted his ontotheology politically. Strict monotheism is the eternal exemplar of his ideal political order and his hierarchical metaphysics echoes his views on the structure of the ideal polity. Pletho was philosophically unable, and at the same time, did not wish to articulate a metaphysics that would continue and complete the Neoplatonist and Christian ones. Instead, he presented a popularized metaphysical order, in close connection to Platonism, Plutarch (c. 45–120), and Dionysius, in order to enhance the sociopolitical value of his programme. At the same time, his stance towards Christian theology was also determined and coloured by his sociopolitical vision. His works prove that he was a proficient theologian, as Syropoulos attested.<sup>80</sup> However, his sociopolitical vision supersedes Christian religion. As with al-Farabi (870–950) and Machiavelli (1469–1527), Pletho holds that Christian religion is not adequate for the establishment of a well-ordered state. Consequently, he turned to a brand of monotheism that combines pagan and Abrahamic elements. Pletho's idiosyncratic syncretism had enough room for Dionysius.

## NOTES

1. About Pletho's life and work: Ioannes Mamalakes (1939), *Georgios Gemistos Plethon*; François Masai (1956), *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra*; Christopher Montague Woodhouse (1986), *George Gemistos Plethon—The Last of the Hellenes*; Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker (2006), *Pléthon. Le retour de Platon*; Niketas Siniossoglou (2011), *Radical Platonism in Byzantium*; Vojtěch Hladký (2014), *The Philosophy of Gemistos Plethon*; Ioannes Smarnakes (2017), *Byzantine Anagenisse kai Outopia*.
2. Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 122, 168, 177, 180–183; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 74.
3. On Pletho's dependence on Proclus see: Polymnia Athanassiadi (2003), 'Byzantine Commentators on the Chaldean Oracles: Psellos and Plethon', 237–252; Jesus de Garay (2017), 'The Reception of Proclus: From Byzantium to the West', 153–174; Stephen Gersh (2014), 'George Gemistos Plethon', 218–223; Theodor Nikolaou (1982), 'Gemistos Plethon und Proklos. Plethon's "Neuplatonismus" am Beispiel seiner Psychologie', 387–399; Tambrun-Krasker (2006), *Pléthon*, 173–185.
4. Demetrios Chatzimichael (2008), *Dionysios o Areopagites, Peri Theion Onomaton, Peri Mystikes Theologias*, 557–558.
5. Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 25.
6. Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 108.
7. Gersh, *Plethon*, 218–219.
8. Siniossoglou, *Radical*, 191–192, 252–254.
9. John of Scythopolis (2011), *Scholia on the Divine Names of Dionysius*, 185B27, 115; Pletho (1966a), 'Νόμων συγγραφή (Book of Laws)' in *Plethon*: 44.14–46.7., 132.13, 152.26–152.27, 168.21, 170.12–170.13, 202.5–202.7.

10. Pletho, *Laws*, 98.6–98.11.
11. Pletho, *Laws*, 46.7–46.16, 204.15–206.2; Pletho (1995), ‘Μαγικά λόγια τῶν ἀπὸ Ζωροάστρου μάγων—Ἐξήγησις εἰς τὰ αὐτὰ λόγια (The Magian Oracles of Zoroaster’s Magi—The Explanation of the Oracles)’, 17.6–17.10.
12. Pletho, *Laws*, 130.14–130.21.
13. Pletho, *Laws*, 116.27–118.12.
14. Pletho, *Laws*, 176; Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 64.
15. Pletho, *Laws*, 46.16–50.5, 172.26–174.6; Leonidas Bargeliotes (1979), ‘Man as Methorion according to Pletho’, 7: 14–20.
16. Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 68, 89.
17. John Dillon (1997), *The Middle Platonists*, 281.
18. James Hankins (1990), *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* v.1, 207.
19. Joseph Matula (2003), ‘Georgios Gemistos Pletho and the idea of Universal Harmony’, 164–165.
20. Pletho (1995), ‘Βραχεῖα τις διασάφησις τῶν ἐν τοῖς λογίοις τούτοις ἀσαφεστέρως λεγομένων (Brief Clarification of What Is Said in These [Magian] Oracles Less Clearly)’, 21–22.
21. Pletho, *Laws*, 64–78; Masai, *Plethon*, 186–200, 216; László Bene (2014), ‘Constructing Pagan Platonism: Plethon’s Theory of Fate and the Ancient Philosophical Tradition’, 41–71.
22. Pletho (1973), ‘De Differentiis’, *Byzantion* 43: 332.24–334.4; Pletho, *Laws*, 66–68.
23. Georgios Zografides (2003), ‘Ο Pantokrator Zeus tou Plethonos: Enologia, Monarchia, Monotheismos’, 145.
24. Masai, *Plethon*, 226–244; Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker (2002), *Les fondaments métaphysiques et éthiques de la pensée politique de Pléthon*, 320–328.
25. Pletho, *Laws*, 242; Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 149.
26. Pletho, *The Magian Oracles*, 6.9–10.
27. Pletho, *Laws*, 20–22; Pletho (1987), ‘Περὶ ἀρετῶν (On Virtues)’, B.10 11.15–24; Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 51.
28. Pletho, *Laws*, 74.11–78.13; Leonidas Bargeliotes (1974), ‘Pletho’s Philosophy of Religion and Ethics’, *Diotima* 2: 125–149; Leonidas Bargeliotes (1976), ‘The Problem of Evil in Pletho’, *Diotima* 4: 116–125.
29. Pletho, *Laws*, 228.19–232.16; Pletho, *On Virtues*, 13.2–13.9; Pletho, *The Magian Oracles*, 13.4–13.15, 15.9–15.12.
30. Pletho (1930), ‘Συμβουλευτικὸς πρὸς τὸν δεσπότην Θεόδωρον περὶ τῆς Πελοποννήσου (Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore on the Peloponnese)’, 125.3–125.12; Mamalakes, *Plethon*, 84.
31. Pletho, *Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore*, 125.12ff.
32. Pletho, *Laws*, 130.
33. Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 122, 168, 177, 180–183; G. Karamanolis (Accepted/In press), ‘Plethon and Scholarios on Using and Abusing Plato and Aristotle’; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 74.
34. Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker (2003), ‘To en, to on kai e politike skepse tou Plithonos’, 86.
35. Vana Nikolaidou-Kyrianidou (1992), *Ο Politikos kata ton Georgio Gemisto Plithona, Eine Platoniki e kata Plethona Politiki Filosofia?*, 27.
36. Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 24–25.
37. Pletho’s God is knowable: *Laws*, 40, 144, 152, 246; Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 75; Zografides, *Ο Pantokrator*, 149.

38. Georgios Vasilaros (1992), 'Ε Ellinike mythologia sto ergo tou Georgiou Gemistou Plithonos', 646–671.
39. Hankins, *Plato*, 195–197.
40. Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 77–78.
41. Pletho, *Laws*, 42, 246; Siniossoglou, *Radical*, 230–235, 243–250.
42. Siniossoglou, *Radical*, 190–191, 238, 252–255, 283–284.
43. Pseudo-Dionysius (2013), 'De Divinis Nominibus', II.11.
44. Siniossoglou, *Radical*, 245–246.
45. Siniossoglou, *Radical*, 247–249.
46. Pletho, *Laws*, 44.14–46.7, 132.13, 152.26–152.27, 168.21, 170.12–170.13, 202.5–202.7.
47. Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus*, II.10.
48. Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 74–75.
49. Gersh, *Plethon*, 218–219.
50. Juan Signes Codoñer (2005), 'Die plethonische "Religion"', in *Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452). Reformpolitiker, Philosoph, Verehrer der alten Götter*, 91–100; Lambros Couloubaritsis (2006), 'Platonismes et aristotélismes à Byzance dans l'empire de Nicée et sous les Paleologues', 155.
51. Pletho (1966b), 'Πρὸς τὸ ὑπὲρ Λατίνων βιβλίον (Reply to the Treatise in Support of Latins)' in *Plethon: Traite des Lois*, 305–306.
52. Zografides, *O Pantokrator*, 155.
53. Pletho, *Reply to the Treatise in Support of Latins*, 311; Monfasani supported that in fact Pletho's position on the procession of the Holy Spirit lies closer to that of the Latins instead of the Orthodox: John Monfasani (1995), 'Pletone, Bessarione e la processione dello spirit santo: un testo inedito e un falso', 843–845.
54. Pletho, *Reply to the Treatise in Support of Latins*, 307–308.
55. Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 108.
56. Pletho (1966c), 'Εὐχή εἰς τὸν ἕνα Θεόν (Prayer to the One God)', in *Plethon: Traite des Lois*, 273–274.
57. Pletho, *Prayer*, 273; Woodhouse, *Plethon*, 45.
58. John Chrysostomus, 'Expositio in Psalmos', in PG 55 (Paris 1862), 375. 18.
59. John Damascenus, 'Homilia in sabbatum sanctum', in PG96 (Paris, 1860), 601–644.
60. Maximus the Confessor, 'Capita de caritate', in PG 90 (Paris, 1860), bk.4, sec.2.2.
61. Zografides, *O Pantokrator*, 153.
62. Niketas Siniossoglou (2017), 'Plethon, Scholarios, and the Byzantine State of Emergency', in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, 639.
63. Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 167.
64. Pletho, *Laws*, 2.
65. Pletho, *Laws*, 16; Hladký, *The Philosophy*, 161.
66. Nikolaidou, *O Politikos*, 24.
67. Matula, *Georgios*, 166–167.
68. Although the most common translation is classes, I am obliged to remark that γένη means that people are connected genealogically.
69. Pletho, *Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore*, 119.23–120.24; Norman Patrick Peritore (1977), 'The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon. A Renaissance Byzantine Reformer', *Polity* 10: 186–188.
70. Nikolaidou, *O Politikos*, 8.
71. Vana Nikolaidou-Kyrianidou (1993), 'Katagogi kai politiki exousia kata ton Georgio Gemisto Plithona', *Elliniki Filosofiki Epitheorisi* 10: 34–36.

72. Pletho, *On Virtues*, 12.1–12.23; Lela Alexidze (2017), ‘Plethon on the Grades of Virtues: Back to Plato via Neoplatonism?’, in *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism*, 221–242; Georgios Arabatzis (2014), ‘Plethon’s Philosophy of the Concept’, in *Georgios Gemistos Plethon: The Byzantine and the Latin Renaissance*, 82–87.
73. Pletho, *Laws*, 150.16–150.21.
74. Pletho, *Laws*, 254.
75. Matula, *Georgios*, 168–169.
76. Pletho, *On Virtues*, 3.9–3.19.
77. Demetrios Chatzimichael (2005), *Georgios Gemistos Plethon, Nomon Sigrafe, Ena Orama gia mia Idaniki Politeia*, 428.
78. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (2014). *De Coelesti Hierarchia, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, De Mystica Theologia, Epistulae*.
79. P. Golitsis (2020). ‘Fifteenth-century eastern reception of Aquinas’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, 81–92; Smarnakes, *Byzantine*, 141.
80. Sylvestre Syropoulos (1971), *Les ‘Mémoires’ de Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438–1439)*, 330.26–332.8, 366.23–368.17, 446.16–21.

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SECTION III

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DIONYSIUS  
IN THE WEST

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## CHAPTER 20

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# OCCULTI MANIFESTATIO: THE JOURNEY TO GOD IN DIONYSIUS AND ERIUGENA

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DEIRDRE CARABINE

## INTRODUCTION

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IN the years between the first and second receptions of the works of Dionysius in the Latin West (almost a quarter of a century), only a few authors make mention of this shadowy thinker. The year 827 was momentous in that the Carolingian court received a manuscript that was given into the safe keeping of the monastery of St Denis outside Paris. The first translation was made by Abbot Hilduin, but Charles the Bald commissioned Irish scholar John the Scot or Eriugena (*d. c.870*) to make another translation not long after (perhaps the king wanted his own court copy or Eriugena wanted a new challenge). Thus, it was in this quite humble way that the fascinating writings of an unknown monk who assumed a dead man's identity was to transform the theology of the Latin West, and indeed its philosophy up to today.<sup>1</sup> As Andrew Louth has noted: 'Eriugena's work created a rare window through which the Latin West could look and see something of the genius of Greek theology, and at the centre of that picture was the figure of Denys the Areopagite.'<sup>2</sup> And in another conclusive description, this time by Eriugenian scholar Édouard Jeuneau: '... on the weft of "mystical Latin" *à la manière* of Augustine or Gregory the Great, Eriugena has embroidered, here with sobriety, there with exuberance, motifs that one would be tempted to describe as exotic, and which, evidently, belong to another tradition.'<sup>3</sup>

While it is certain that Eriugena's bringing together ideas from the Greek East and the Latin West, broadly classified as Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory of Nyssa on the one hand, and Ambrose, Boethius, Augustine, and the canon of the day on the other,<sup>4</sup> we should not forget that both sets of sources relied on different forms of Platonism: broadly speaking, the Latin West on Plotinus and the Greek East on Proclus, and some of Eriugena's sources had already been captivated by the Dionysian corpus. The bringing together of ideas from East and West is what makes Eriugena's voice quite different from many of those who had sung in the choir of theology.

This essay will attempt to explicate and tease out some key themes that revolve around the idea of God becoming not God by becoming all things, a theologically tricky thematic that Eriugena would have found in the writings of that elusive figure who so deeply influenced centuries of Western theology. Rather than give a systematic exposition of the ideas Eriugena developed from his reading of Dionysius, we have chosen to give a side-by-side exposition of some key elements of the thematic shared by both rather than devote separate sections to each author. Sometimes we will be talking in the voice of Dionysius and sometimes that of Eriugena. It will be made clear which is which.

## STARTING POINTS

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The Dionysian corpus represents one attempt to explain the whole of reality as a comprehensible order, as hierarchy (literally sacred source), both heavenly and earthly, keeping in mind always that 'God is in no way like the things that have being and we have no knowledge at all of his incomprehensible and ineffable transcendence and invisibility' (CH 2, 3, 141A, 150).<sup>5</sup> 'God is not a thing and we cannot know him'.<sup>6</sup> The first point to make here is that there is no strict logical progression in the development of Dionysian thought such as we find in the *Summa* of Aquinas. The *Divine Names*, for example, can be understood as hymns in praise<sup>7</sup> of that which cannot be spoken and also as demonstrative of the ontological significance of the two theologies. In the first chapters of this work, the fundamental importance of the apophatic way is repeated again and again (see DN 1:1, 588A, 49). The exegesis of each of the names chosen by Dionysius reveals a deep understanding of the apophatic truth that underpins all that can be hymned about God which: '... is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name.' (DN 1:1, 588B, 50). At the same time, an intricate kataphatic/apophatic tension is closely woven into the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, while the *Mystical Theology* can be interpreted in a number of ways, not least as a further explication of the two theologies and the divine reality to which they relate. Traditionally, the famous prayer of the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* was seen as an allegory for the spiritual journey (and no doubt Gregory of Nyssa was the Dionysian inspiration here), as Moses relentlessly climbs the mountain into the darkness of God. There the blinded soul throws itself against the divine ray, and through 'unknowing knowing' comes to be united with the ineffable source of all. Andrew Louth's concise explication of the

Dionysian corpus as fundamentally liturgical,<sup>8</sup> does much to add a further dimension to this initial interpretation.

Eriugena's self-imposed task (to explain reality) was not so dissimilar to that of Dionysius except that he begins with the concept of *natura* and attempts to elucidate the whole of theology under this aspect. In his way of telling the story of creation, Eriugena explains four divisions as the lens through which he will explain reality: that which created and is not created (God), that which creates and is created (the Primordial Causes, the ideas of all things that exist eternally in divine wisdom), that which is created and does not create (human nature), and that which is uncreated and does not create, that to which all things will eventually return (P.III 621A–622A). Further, in contemplating *natura* in its comprehensiveness, the human mind, through *divisoria* and *resolutiva*, echoes the rhythm of creation itself that is in eternal movement from God and back to God, a reflection of the Dionysian conception of the kataphatic and apophatic theologies as movement towards created effects and movement back to unity with God. Both our authors, therefore, build a theological framework on the thematic of progression and return. The familiar Neoplatonic triad of Dionysius: remaining, proceeding, and returning (*monê, prodos, epistrophê*),<sup>9</sup> is consistently echoed in Eriugena's writings (see for example, P.I, 521C).<sup>10</sup>

## ALL THINGS ARE GOD: CREATION *EX NIHILO*

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In the *Periphyseon* Eriugena's thoughts on *nihilum* as found in Book III (634–688), constitute a fascinating treatise on the subject.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, as Andrew Louth has remarked, Dionysius himself does not, as was accepted by that time, speak of creation as *ex nihilo*, preferring to say that all things simply come from God. 'The reason for this is that creation is not central to his understanding of the relationship of the universe to God ...', rather, Louth posits that what is central is the idea of theophany. 'The world is a theophany, a manifestation of God, in which beings closer to God manifest God to those further away. The world is God's glory made manifest ... God is immediately present to his whole creation as its creator.'<sup>12</sup> In the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena develops a similar understanding of theophany and takes it even further: the nothingness from which all things are created has to be God's self because there can be nothing co-eternal or co-existing with God.<sup>13</sup>

Eriugena embarks on the explication of *nihilum* when he lands himself in a spot of bother with what Michael Sells calls the 'ontological shadow' (which also dogs the language of emanation). This comes about when Eriugena, following Dionysius, describes participation as deriving from a superior essence (P.III 632B; see DN 5:5, 820C) implying that the 'second essence' must already 'be' in order to receive from above. In order to extricate himself from this ontological problem, Eriugena embarks on a discourse on *nihilum*, which 'leads to an argument that hovers at the edge of collapse, and to a general critique of spatial, temporal, and causal signification within the language of creation.'<sup>14</sup>



And while we agree that Eriugena's exegesis is not without difficulties (and it is precisely the role of his novice to point these out and edge his master further and further into untrodden territory), his 'solution' to the problem of what things were before they were called into being is to rely once more on 'Saint Dionysius' who said: 'What I wish to do is to sing a hymn of praise for the being-making procession of the absolute divine Source of being into the total domain of being' (DN 5:1, 816B, 96).

Beginning with the fundamental Dionysian assertion: 'It is not that he exists here and not there. He does not possess this kind of existence and not that. No. He is all things since he is the Cause of all things. ... Therefore every attribute may be predicated of him and yet he is not any one thing' (DN 5:8, 824B, 101). Eriugena develops the idea that creation *ex nihilo* simply has to be understood as creation *ex deo*. The *nihillum* of Genesis is nothing other than the divine wisdom (*nihil per excellentiam*—P.III 681A) in which all things are created (Psalm 104:24, RSV).<sup>15</sup> Eriugena returns to this text many times but does not give it a Christological character, but rather makes a loose association with the Primordial Causes, the ideas for all things existing eternally in the source of all. 'The divine *nihil* constitutes the ground for theophanic self-creation, which in turn cannot be thought apart from the transcendence which it manifests in the otherness of created essence and being'.<sup>16</sup> It is here perhaps that we see the most striking Eriugenian development of a key Dionysian thematic, one that was strongly mediated through the Christocentric ontology of Maximus.

Everything, both sensible and intelligible is an appearance of that which is non-apparent (P.III 633A); as Eriugena succinctly notes: God is *principium, medium, et finis* (P.III 689A). Once more relying on Dionysius (without the One there can be no multiplicity (DN 5:5 and 13:2), Eriugena finally makes the bold assertion that God makes all things and is made in all things (P.III 633A). Everything, then, is of God who: *facit omnia et fit in omnibus et omnia est* (P.III 634A). This logically impossible is beyond speech and rational, earth-bound thought, as the reaction of Eriugena's novice shows (dramatically he declares himself to be surrounded on all sides by the dark clouds of his thoughts). Listen to Eriugena: 'For if the understanding of all things is all things and It alone understands all things, then It alone is all things ... For it encircles all things and there is nothing within It but what, in so far as it is, is not Itself, for It alone truly is ...' (P.III 632D–633A). Dionysius summarizes as follows: 'But since, as sustaining source of goodness, by the very fact of Its being, It is cause of all things that be, from all created things must we celebrate the benevolent Providence of the Godhead; for all things are both around It and for It, and It is before all things, and all things in It consist' (DN 1:5 593D, also DN 7:3). Thus, in taking a Dionysian thematic slowly and painstakingly to its ultimate, and somewhat audacious, conclusion, Eriugena states that all things not only are eternal in the Word but *are* the Word (P.III 641A): '... all things are at once both eternal and made in the Word' (P.III 641C).

Thomas Carlson comments as follows:

... interpreting the cosmic dialectic of divine immanence and transcendence as divine self-creation, Eriugena, like Dionysius, can see all of the cosmos as an

infinitely varied showing or appearance of God. Just as the Scripture in which God reveals himself opens the way to an endless variety of possible readings, where one meaning leads to the next within an endless exegetical *transitus* toward the absolutely simple and inaccessible ground of all meaning, so the cosmos offers an endless multiplicity of theophanies that can be read (P.III, 679A) to show the invisible God from as many different angles as there are holy souls to desire God's appearance.<sup>17</sup>

As that rather lovely Dionysian passage has it: 'Thus Providence occurs everywhere. It contains everything and, at the same time, it is something in something, but in a transcending way; in no way is it nothing in nothing. For it quite surpasses everything, being and standing and remaining forever in the sameness of its self . . .' (Ep 9:4, 1109C, 286). There are many echoes and developments of this in the *Periphyseon*.

## VEILING AND UNVEILING: REVELATION AS CONCEALMENT

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Having established that God both makes and is made in all things, we must be clear that 'being made' does not somehow reveal God or a part of God but, paradoxically, further conceals, veils God, as Dionysius would put it. In the *Periphyseon* the *nihilum* of Genesis becomes other than God and 'reveals' itself by becoming something both itself and that which comes from it can know (P.III 689A–C). In Dionysian terms this is because we cannot perceive intelligible reality without sensible adornment (Ep. 9:6, 1117B). But at the same time, creation also obscures God because it is other than God '... invisible it is seen, and while it is being seen it is invisible', says Eriugena (P.III 633C). This complex thematic of creation as the creation of 'God' will eventually be taken up by Meister Eckhart: 'When I flowed forth from God, all creatures declared: "There is a God" ...'<sup>18</sup> And again: 'Therefore I am my own cause according to my essence, which is eternal, and not according to my becoming, which is temporal.'<sup>19</sup>

Here in Eriugena a further paradox is set up in terms of God as creator and God as not-creator (all things are eternally in God). Ernesto Mainoldi summarizes this well: 'He is conceived as creator in consideration of the things that are created by Him; He is conceived as non-creator when considering that the creation is eternally in Him as uncreated and this uncreated status cannot admit its negation, that is to say creation. Creation is then impossible because God is *natura quae non creatur et non creat*, but creation is at the same time possible because God is creator as well.'<sup>20</sup> God becomes not-God through the process of ex-stasis, literally God's going out from God into the appearances of God, a lovely Neoplatonic thematic developed by Dionysius as the Good calling all things into being: '... in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign yearning for all is also carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from

his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself' (DN 4:13 712A–B, 82).

This is how Eriugena develops the Dionysian concept: the transition from nothingness into all things can be thought of as 'self-negation', divine *kenosis* in the ontological sense. Creation, therefore, does not refer to the making of things that exist outside of God, but the exteriorization of God's thought as spoken in the Word. And indeed, if God is somehow revealed through God's appearances, then it follows that God was not God before God created. It is in this sense that we can understand Meister Eckhart's so-called audacious statement: 'If I were not, God would not be either'.<sup>21</sup> In creation, then, God makes God's self. This is how Dionysius puts it: 'He is present to all and he is everywhere, according to one and the same and the totality of everything. He proceeds to everything while yet remaining within himself. He is at rest and astir, is neither resting nor stirring and has neither source, nor middle nor end. He is in nothing. He is no thing' (DN 5:9, 825B, 103). And this is how Eriugena puts it: '... God, by manifesting Himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature, the invisible making Himself visible and the incomprehensible comprehensible and the hidden revealed and the unknown known ...' (P.III 678C). And lest we think that Eriugena is speaking about the reality of the Incarnation,<sup>22</sup> he lets us know that he is explaining the act of creation as the ineffable descent of the Good so that all things can be (P.III 678D), a singularly important Dionysian thematic. It is thus that revelation is concealment and concealment revelation: the veiling and unveiling of God. As Philipp Rosemann puts it: 'the interplay of revelation and concealment stands at the core of reality'.<sup>23</sup>

It would have deep implications in Eriugena's writings when he read the words of our sixth-century monk:

He is yearning on the move, simple, self-moved, self-acting, pre-existent in the Good, flowing out from the Good onto all that is and returning once again to the Good. In this divine yearning shows especially its unbeginning and unending nature traveling in an endless circle through the Good, from the Good, in the Good and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same center, ever in the same direction, always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself' (DN 4:14, 712C–713A, 83).

And Eriugena repeatedly uses the familiar Neoplatonic idea (with a very long history) that all multiplicity comes from and returns to the One: 'The name "One" means that God is uniquely all things through the transcendence of one unity and that he is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness' (DN 13:2, 977C, 128). In short, 'You will find nothing in the world which is not in the One' (DN13:3, 980C, 129). This is indeed Eriugena's primary inspiration in developing the thematic of God going outside God's self to become some thing. The ineffable *processio* into creation means that the very process of creation is the Oneness that is God appearing as multiplicity, as other-than-God, 'becoming' God, while at the same time, God remains other than not-God.

God goes out to become not-God, to become creature while remaining God, that is, God-in-otherness. On the issue of alterity, and God's otherness as created, we would like to mention one further point: even though human beings are created *in imago dei*, it is in the sense that we are *from* God; we remain, paradoxically, the image of the imageless.

For Eriugena, the 'stuff' of creation, *ousia*, is fundamentally unknowable precisely *because* it is God. This is why the process of alterity, of God becoming not-God, is simultaneous revelation and concealment. Otten explains:

Central to Dionysius's use of negative theology ... is the introduction not just of a dialectic between the human and the divine—that much was to be expected from the outset—but the setting in motion of a kind of reverse divine striptease: an unveiling of the divine which results not in its undressing but in its redressing, as the divine bareness becomes more and more hidden.<sup>24</sup>

The *extasis* that is God's going out of God's self that paradoxically results in God becoming other than God's self, does not reveal God *per se*, but rather shows *that* God is, because God is not a what, a Dionysian thematic mentioned many, many times in the *Periphyseon*. God cannot be understood as either 'this' or 'that', yet God is precisely 'this and that' (P.I 468B and DN 1:5, 593C); God as Cause being made in God's effects (P.III 687C)<sup>25</sup> is a very definite confusion of the laws of causality!

Eriugena's most eloquent expression of the simultaneous truth of God revealed yet obscured is most Dionysian in origin: 'Everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else but the apparition of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation of the negated, the comprehension of the incomprehensible ... the understanding of the unintelligible, the body of the bodiless, the essence of the superessential, the form of the formless ...' (P.III 633A–B). In the words of Dionysius: 'As Paul said and as true reason has said, the ordered arrangement of the whole visible realm makes known the invisible things of God' (Ep. 9:2, 1108C, 284). 'The visible is truly the plain image of the invisible' (Ep. 9:6, 1117B, 289, and Ep. 9:2, 1108B, 284), and in the *Celestial Hierarchy* Dionysius simply notes: 'the appearances of beauty are the signs of an invisible loveliness' (CH 1:3, 121D, 146). Eriugena's commentary on this very text elucidates further: 'Visible forms, whether those in the nature of things or those in the holy symbols of the divine scriptures, should be contemplated not because of themselves or the desires they instil in us, but rather because they are the images of an invisible beauty. Through them divine providence recalls human souls to the pure and invisible beauty of its own truth.'<sup>26</sup>

## THE RETURN OF GOD INTO GOD

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And this point brings us to a discussion of the resolution of all multiplicity into unity, the return of God from otherness into God, a thematic with fundamental similarities

yet subtle differences between our two authors. While one aspect of Eriugena's thought can be understood as an elucidation of the process of *resolutiva* when God shall be 'all in all', the fact that things exist in the way that they do means that God is, in an ineffable way, already 'all in all'.<sup>27</sup> This means we can say that creation is already God, already deified, because its very identity is God. But in true Neoplatonic fashion, God simultaneously remains above created effects in the darkness and unknowability of God's hidden essence, as the mighty Plotinian One remains above all duality in majestic rest (*Ennead*. VI 7, 39, 21). As Eric Perl notes: 'Not only is God both transcendent and immanent, but his transcendence is his immanence and his immanence is his transcendence'.<sup>28</sup> In Eriugena, this idea is, of course, taken from both Dionysius and Maximus. This is not the place to document where Eriugena was relying on Maximus in terms of the return of all things; it is sufficient to note that not only was he using Dionysius but also Dionysius as explicated in a Christological context by Maximus who had already glossed the Dionysian corpus.<sup>29</sup>

Eriugena takes the Plotinian-Dionysian theme of the extasis of the Good not only calling all things into being but also calling all things back to itself in love (DN 4:7, 4:10, 4:13 and P.III 680C).<sup>30</sup> And in Dionysius we should not forget that it is through negations that we come to stand outside ourselves and to be of God (DN 7:1 865D and DN 13:3 981B), as Stang put it, in Dionysius: '*Eros* is the engine of apophasis, a yearning that stretches language to the point that it breaks, stretches the lover to the point that he splits'.<sup>31</sup> And Andrew Louth notes: 'In one place, Denys speaks of the soul not so much going out of itself, as being driven out of itself ... and indeed being driven out by the way of negation'.<sup>32</sup> Eriugena says: 'He is the Cause of all love and is diffused through all things and gathers all things together into one and involves them in Himself in an ineffable Return, and brings to an end in Himself the motions of love of the whole creature (P.I 519D–520A). But at times we see Eriugena with a different emphasis as, through the lens of his reading of Maximus, it is through the Word that all *natura* is returned to its source; the Word does not return alone but brings the whole of creation with it. Like Maximus, Eriugena sees deification in relation to the hominification of the divinity in the Incarnation. In the *Divine Names* Dionysius finds the impetus for this extasis in that love-inspired moment of Gal. 2:20 ('I live, no not I, but Christ lives in me'; see DN 4:13, 712A) and in the *Mystical Theology* Moses ascending the mountain of God's darkness. In Dionysius both Moses and Paul are variously exemplars of extasis, of standing outside of self to be of God.

But Dionysius had also developed the complex thematic that it is through hierarchy that God's otherness returns to God. Hierarchy is, after all, how all things came to be as he explains in Letter 9: Providence '... proceeds step by step down to everything without ever ceasing to remain within itself' (1109D, 286). And further: 'The common goal of every hierarchy consists of the continuous love of God and of things divine, a love which is sacredly worked out in an inspired and unique way, ... It consists of a feast upon that sacred vision which nourishes the intellect and which divinizes everything rising up to it' (EH 1:3, 376B, 198). And so it is hierarchy that gives all things the power '... to rise up, so far as they may, toward itself and it unifies them by way of its own simplified unity. However, this divine ray can enlighten us only by being upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings'

(CH 1:2, 121B, 146). In brief, as Dionysius notes in the *Celestial Hierarchy*: 'The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him. ... A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God' (CH. 3:1, 165A–B, 154, and CH 1:1, 120B, 145 and CH 3: 3, 168A). This is the process (for want of a better word) of God's otherness being moved back to itself—God's work. And these workings of hierarchy, I believe, colour Eriugena's understanding of the process of return through the Word. In assuming human nature, the Word raises all things up, and as Cause, returns all things to Itself. In Eriugena the creature does not work, does not stand outside itself; rather the creature becomes not creature when God returns all things back into God's self.<sup>33</sup>

In both Dionysius and Eriugena, in the return of all multiplicity to unity, nothing more can be said. There is no-thing to know, no-thing to see; the soul is blinded; without the veil of existing created things it can see no thing because God is no thing; God has no content as Wayne Hankey put it.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, negation becomes a constant *kenosis*, a descent into nothingness while at the same time an unknowing 'ascent' into the divine darkness. The different metaphors in Dionysius point to the same truth, while in Eriugena the return of all things is explicated in a more focused eschatological fashion. In *Periphyseon* Book V, Eriugena sums it up as the return of all to Paradise when all created effects return to their cause, and he envisages the return on a number of levels. The four-fold division of nature is collapsed/telescoped into two: God as *arche* and *telos* as one, and created effects into their causes (P.V 1020Aff), and then further collapsed into one as all are returned to the thought in the divine mind. Eriugena also speaks passionately about the general return of humankind (saved by the Word) into the dignity of the Divine Image (P.V 1020B). But there is a further conception of return (the special return) in Eriugena that was strongly influenced by his reading of Dionysius and Dionysius in Maximus on deification: '... the supernatural merging of the perfectly purified souls into God Himself, and their entry into the darkness of the incomprehensible and inaccessible Light which conceals the Causes of all things' (P.V 1021A). Eriugena's liberal use of the ideas of Ambrose and Maximus, coupled with numerous biblical illustrations, are fused with his deep affinity with Saint Dionysius whereby when God shall be all in all, Inaccessible Light remains inaccessible. In this way, Eriugena's conception of God returning to God is a rich tapestry woven from many materials, but his fundamental starting point (and often closest ally in convincing his novice to accept his often revolutionary ideas) is Dionysius.

However, 'it would be all too simplistic to think that, in the mystical itinerary, the mind moves in a linear way from cataphatic to apophatic discourses, or from multiplicity to unity. Even though Dionysius' mystical itinerary seems clear-cut in theory, the usage of different types of discourse in his different works is not so clear-cut in practice'.<sup>35</sup> In the words of Charles Stang:

In the *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius reveals that the tension that occupied him in the first several chapters of the *Divine Names* is never relieved, that one never ceases saying and unsaying. On the contrary, he wishes to heighten the tension by insisting that while one is bound to affirm and negate the divine names just as God reveals and



conceals, still neither affirmations nor even negations are ever adequate and always miss their target.<sup>36</sup>

As we peruse all the Dionysian treatises, the ontological significance of the kataphatic and apophatic ways of praising God becomes increasingly clear. 'The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing' (MTh. 3, 1033B–C, 139). In order to understand the created order, we have to see the affirmations as not true, and through negations, we then move silently, as blinded souls, into the divine darkness (see also DN 1:4, 592C–D, 53).

As Kevin Hart has put it:

What the Pseudo-Dionysius calls the [divine names]—Good, Light, Beauty, Love—function in an economy that circulates between the cryptic and the communicable. Within theology these names are empowered to appropriate themselves even as they move among us, that is, to declare themselves proper. Hence negative theology: the doubled process of exposing that reappropriation while gradually contracting the scope of the economy so that we can move from the sayable in the direction of the unsayable. It is a dark passage from religious codes to the divine idiom, from [God] to God, and one that is never able to be fully traversed.<sup>37</sup>

The bottom line is, of course, that divine reality can never be explained.

## CONCLUSION

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It is thus that Dionysian kataphatic theology reveals the story of creation while apophatic theology is the means by which all multiplicity is called into unity where there cannot be any kind of knowing, or seeing, or understanding. However, the way of negations is not a way despite the nomenclature; neither is it a process, although it has an inherent procedure. Rather, it is a state best expressed in Eckhart's vernacular sermon *Nolite Timere*: of the Godhead there is nothing to be said; in that ground, there God unbecomes.<sup>38</sup> When God becomes not God and returns to God, then God is not—a somewhat audacious statement if not interpreted in terms of the continuous dialectic between transcendence and immanence, between knowing and not knowing, between multiplicity and unity.

And so it was that, through an almost anonymous Irishman's translations of the Dionysian corpus, his astute commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and his own mighty *Periphyseon* (transmitted via the *Clavis Physicae*), the major thematics of our anonymous Syrian monk became foundational reading for later generations after Hugh of St Victor wrote his own commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* in the twelfth century. After that, Dionysius was assured a place at the high table of theology and philosophy. And despite his unmasking by Laurentius Valla in the fifteenth century, and definitively



by the two German scholars (Koch and Stigylmayr) at the end of the nineteenth century, the development of his themes through medieval times cannot be eradicated and Dionysius continues to provide inspiration for our current generation of philosopher-theologians. Had it not been for my fellow countryman, I suspect the mysticism of the medieval period and beyond would have been bereft of a most singular way of speaking about and thinking about the source of all.

## NOTES

1. The latest compilation on Dionysius is contained in Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang, eds, *Modern Theology*, 24, 4 (2008), subsequently published as *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
2. *Denys the Areopagite*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series (London and Wilton CT: Geoffrey Chapman and Morehouse-Barlow, 1989) 122.
3. Édouard Jeuneau, 'Jean l'Érigène et les "Ambigua ad Johannem"', in his *Études érigéniennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987) 73–74.
4. On Eriugena's sources see: Anne-Marie Mooney, *Theophany. The Appearing of God According to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*. Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, 146 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 2009), ch.6; Werner Beierwaltes, ed. *Eriugena. Studien zu seinen Quellen*. Vorträge des III. Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums. Freiburg im Breisgau, 27–30. August 1979, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980); Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten, eds, *Eriugena: East and West*. Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame 18–20 October 1991 (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).
5. The referencing system used for the CD will first give the chapter and subheading, then the PG reference; translations will be referred to by the pagination in Colm Lubheid's translation: *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (Paulist Press: New York and Mahwah, 1987). For Eriugena, the book number of the *Periphyseon* will be followed by the PL reference; translations are those of I. P. Sheldon-Williams as revised by John J. O'Meara, *Periphyseon* (Montréal and Washington: Bellarmin and Dumbarton Oaks, 1987).
6. Denys Turner, 'De-centering Theology', *Modern Theology* 2: 2 (1986) 142.
7. *Denys the Areopagite*, 78–79.
8. *Denys the Areopagite*, 30–31 and 99–109.
9. 'But although the abiding divinity transcends the proceeding divinity insofar as it is its cause, cause and effect here are nevertheless identical insofar as it is the same divinity that both abides and proceeds. This is so because it is only in a sense that what is caused is other than what causes. The cause, in order to cause, has to give itself to what it causes. What is caused is nothing apart from its cause; it does not possess any being of its own, but merely derives it from its cause. What causes abides in itself, but what is caused abides in what causes.' Francisco J. Romero Carrasquillo, 'The Intertwining of Multiplicity and Unity in Dionysius' Metaphysical Mysticism', *Tópicos* 44 (2013) 216–217.
10. As Paul Rorem notes: 'Dionysius and others after him connected this return very closely with salvation itself.' *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 52.

11. One of the earliest commentaries on this thematic was 'Notas sobre la *Creatio de nihilo* en Juan Escoto Eriugena,' *Sapientia* 23 (1968) 37–58; see also Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages*, 212–240.
12. *Denys the Areopagite*, 85.
13. A comprehensive account of Eriugena's understanding of theophany can be found in Anne-Marie Mooney, *Theophany. The Appearing of God According to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*.
14. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago, IL/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 39.
15. See Ernesto Mainoldi, 'Creation in Wisdom: Eriugena's Sophiology beyond Ontology and Meontology,' in *Eriugena and Creation*, Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies held in honor of Édouard Jeuneau, Chicago, 9–12 November 2011, eds W. Otten, M. I. Allen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014) 183–222.
16. Donald Duclow, 'Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scottus Eriugena,' *Journal of Religion*, 57: 2 (1977) 119.
17. Thomas A. Carlson, *The Indiscrete Image. Infinitude and Creation of the Human* (Chicago, IL/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 87.
18. See the German sermon *Beati pauperes spiritu* in the translation of M.O'C. Walshe, *Meister Eckhart Sermons and Treatises*, vol. II (London/Dulverton: Watkins), 275.
19. *Beati pauperes spiritu*, Walshe, vol. II, 275.
20. 'Creation in Wisdom: Eriugena's Sophiology beyond Ontology and Meontology,' 212.
21. *Beati pauperes spiritu*, Walshe, vol. II, 275.
22. While the Incarnation has been ignored by much Eriugenian scholarship, according to a recent publication by John F. Gavin, creation does not automatically return to its source: the Word is not simply a 'jump start' for the *epistrophe*. At the heart of Gavin's analysis is Eriugena's own contention that all things exist eternally in the Word and that humanity has a unique causal position as the knower in whom the hexaemeron unfolds. While the Word is Creative Wisdom humanity is Created Wisdom who sees the divine drama of creation unfold by bestowing being on all things through knowing them. See *A Celtic Christology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co: 2014). See also Eriugena's poem *Aulae sidereae* in John O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 182ff.
23. 'Causality as Concealing Revelation in Eriugena: A Heideggerian Interpretation,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 79: 4 (2005) 654.
24. 'In The Shadow of the Divine: Negative Theology and Negative Anthropology in Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena,' 443.
25. According to Willemien Otten, this passage is an inversion of the hierarchical order of cause and effect. 'Instead of God creating the world in his capacity of being its eternal cause, it is God who becomes created through his effects. Eriugena thus appears completely to overturn the logical order of events as he comes to make creation almost responsible for God's unfolding as its cause.' *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) 71.
26. Jeanne Barbet, *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975) 511–518.
27. Eriugena himself says this in Book III 683C, but explains the difference in terms of the fall and subsequent redemptive activity of the incarnate Word.
28. 'Metaphysics and Christology in Maximus Confessor and Eriugena,' 254.
29. In addition to Eric Perl's fine essay mentioned above, see also Andrew Louth, 'The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas,' in *Modern Theology* 24: 4 (2008) 585–599.

30. 'Our ecstatic yearning after God, then, is in response to God's ecstatic yearning after us, and indeed all creation. Enticed by the prospect of yearning for a beloved creation, God stood outside him-self to create and now stands outside himself, yearning for creation to return to its source.' Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite 'No Longer I'*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 169.
31. *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite 'No Longer I'*, 169–170.
32. *Denys the Areopagite*, 103.
33. I have discussed Eriugena's conception of the return at length in *John Scottus Eriugena, Great Medieval Thinkers* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 93–107.
34. Wayne Hankey, 'The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism in Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank and the Origins of Western Subjectivity in Augustine and Eriugena', *Hermathena* 165 (1998) 18.
35. Francisco J. Romero Carrasquillo, 'The Intertwining of Multiplicity and Unity in Dionysius' Metaphysical Mysticism', 233.
36. Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite 'No Longer I'*, 128.
37. 'Jacques Derrida: The God Effect', in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. P. Blond (London: Routledge, 1998) 277–278.
38. On God having no content, see Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 4.

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## CHAPTER 21

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# JOHN SARRACENUS AND HIS INFLUENCE

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MARK EDWARDS

THOSE who are famous for one thing only run the risk of not being famous at all. The celebrity of John Scotus Eriugena (815–877) ensures that any scholar who makes a study of the Dionysian corpus will be aware that he translated it into Latin, or at least some approximation to that language. On the other hand, there are scholars fully conversant with the corpus and its Greek legacy who are unacquainted with the very name of twelfth-century scholar John Sarracenus. Such ignorance would be less pardonable in a student of the Latin reception, for if there were no Sarracenus there would be no commentaries on Dionysius by Thomas Gallus, Albertus Magnus, or Thomas Aquinas and the medieval tradition of English piety would be robbed of its greatest jewel. In the third part of this essay, we shall consider the creative use that was made of his translation by the anonymous author of *Denys Hid Divinite*; it will be expedient to begin, however, with a sketch of his life and the purpose of his labours, and then to review in detail the measures that he adopted to make a difficult treatise palatable to readers who not only knew no Greek but harboured a typically Latin distaste for metaphysical ruminations that did not bear visible fruit in the service of God.

## WHY SARRACENUS?

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No dates can be securely assigned to the life of Sarracenus. If, as Gabriel Théry (1962) has conjectured, he wrote his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchies* around 1140 and undertook his translation of the whole Dionysian corpus some twenty years later, we may propose 1110 as a likely date of birth. The cognomen Sarracenus has been thought to show that he was born a Muslim, and this inference does not seem to be weakened by the arguments of Julie Anne Taylor in her recent study *Muslims in Medieval Italy* (2003: 73–74). Taylor can produce a Sarracenus who was employed as a bishop's

secretary, another who traded as a Christian merchant, and a female Sarracena whom our sources describe as a Jew. Nothing, however, appears to be known in any of these instances of the provenance of the person bearing the name, and it was no more impossible then than now to convert from one faith to another, whether one did so by conviction, under duress, or for worldly advantage. In the case of a woman, marriage alone might suffice to effect the conversion. No one contends that John Sarracenus is anything but a Christian in his writings; if we wish to throw doubt on the hypothesis that he was reared as a Muslim, we might do best to argue not from accidents of usage but from the history of the term 'Saracen', which was in origin not religious but ethnographic. The Sarrakenoi were known to Byzantine authors as a people before they adopted a new religion, and while the ethnic designation tends to go proxy for the name 'Muslim' in Western sources, we cannot exclude the possibility that a Saracen by race might in some rare case be a Christian by nurture, whether or not this fact was apparent to his European co-religionists.

Because he evinced a knowledge of Greek that has been pronounced 'remarkable' in a Latin writer of this age (Berschin 1980: 278), it has also been surmised that Sarracenus was a Greek Christian (Millor and Brooke 1979: 269 n. 1). Only a little less baseless is the theory that he was a monk of St Denis, which has been inspired by the dedication to Abbot Suger of his versions of the *Mystical Theology*, the *Divine Names*, and the *Epistles* of Dionysius. Firmer evidence of his location is afforded by two letters from John of Salisbury, both written in 1167, the year in which he also sought the patronage of Suger. In the later one (letter 232) John asks the arch-chancellor of Poitiers to send him copies of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which had been completed by Sarracenus under his jurisdiction (Millor and Brooke 1979: 422–425). He had previously addressed Sarracenus himself as a friend in letter 194, exhorting him to complete the *Celestial Hierarchy* and also to solve a question that he had found no scholar competent to answer, though it concerned the use of Greek in the Latin Fathers (Millor and Brooke 1979: 268–275. The subject of inquiry was not, as some have alleged, the meaning of the term *ousia*, for John himself was not an unlearned man; what he wished to know, however, was whether Hilary and Ambrose were correct in asserting that this term implied not merely being but the constant and immutable existence that belongs to God alone. In addition, he hoped that Sarracenus would teach him the difference in Greek thought between substance and nature, a matter on which all modern commentators would be glad of illumination. We do not know whether Sarracenus was able to satisfy his curiosity, nor whether the dedication of the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* to John of Salisbury followed or preceded the correspondence of 1167.

Intellectual history associates Sarracenus with the Victorine tradition, not only because his translation of the Dionysian corpus was employed by Thomas Gallus, but because it was Hugh of St Victor who revived the study of Dionysian mysticism in the Latin West. Hugh's commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, completed some time before the year of his death in 1141, was based not on the Greek (which he was unable to read with ease) but on the hitherto neglected lucubrations of John Scotus Eriugena, who even in the ninth century was accused by the great librarian Anastasius of producing a

translation that was less lucid than the original. If the results of Gabriel Théry's research (1962) are to be accepted, the first contribution of Sarracenus to Dionysian studies was another commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, almost contemporaneous with that of Hugh of St Victor, and once again based on the Latin of Eriugena. The only other translation, that of Hilduin, was not made directly from the Greek but (as Théry 1948 opines) from an oral rendition into the vernacular by some dragoman to whom the original Greek was read aloud. The chief fault of Eriugena—apart from the inaccuracies occasioned by his use of an imperfect text—was the frequency with which he chose to transliterate rather than translate the Greek because he could find no exact equivalent in Latin. Moved, as some opine, by a burgeoning cult of the aesthetic which numbered Suger and the Victorines among its patrons (Christe 1969: 160), Sarracenus resolved at last to create a new version which would please the ear no less than it satisfied the understanding. At the same time, his project was to revise Eriugena, not to produce a wholly new translation: as Théry says with some exaggeration, he took the Irishman, not the Areopagite, for his text.

Théry (1948: 370) does not deny his knowledge of Greek, which is amply proved by his occasional adoption of such terms as *hypotyposis*, *archetypus*, or *thearchia*, which are present in the original but were not reproduced in the hybrid Latin of his predecessor. He also contends that Sarracenus possessed a better manuscript, which had come into the hands of Anastasius in 875. As an instance of its superiority, he notes that, where Eriugena read εἰδιος (in his manuscript of 827, understanding this to mean 'individual' or 'particular', Sarracenus read εἰλιος, i.e. ἥλιος or 'sun', and thus correctly translated what the author undoubtedly wrote. Where, as is usual, Sarracenus and Eriugena have the same text before them, Théry finds that the cases in which Sarracenus prefers to transcribe the Greek are anomalous, his general custom being to supply the Latin term which Eriugena had eschewed or failed to discover. Thus he replaces *photisma* by *illuminatio*, *thearchia* by *dei principatus*, *on* by *esse*, *theoria* by *contemplatio*, *agalma* by *insignium*, *theophania* by *visio* or *apparitio Dei*, and *hymnodia* by *laudatio*.<sup>1</sup> At the same time he preserves Eriugena's renderings of the key terms, writing *ablatio* for *aphairesis*, *positio* for *thesis*, *affirmativa* for *kataphatikos*, and *negativa* for *apophatikos*. The result is a text that, while it is sometimes closer to the Greek, is always more intelligible to the Greekless reader; no wonder then that this new translation gave wings to the study of Dionysius in the twelfth century, whereas that of Eriugena had the stultifying effect that the Latinate idiom of the Douai Rheims Bible of 1582 would have had on the study of Scripture by Catholics in England had it never been revised. For all that, Sarracenus never pretended to have overcome all the difficulties of converting the sinuous prose of the Areopagite into a tongue that was no one's vernacular in his own time and which even in classical times had never rivalled the elasticity of Greek. He admits as much in the preface to his translation of the *Celestial Hierarchy*:<sup>2</sup>

Ubi vero graecis dictionibus aequipollentes latinos non reperi, vel locutionem a latinorum idiomate discrepare comperi, vel graecas dictiones detorsii vel de sensu auctoris quod potui et ut potui latinis dictionibus designavi (But when I could not



find Latin expressions of equal force to the Greek ones, or perceived that the expression was at odds with Latin idiom, I have either turned Greek expressions to my purpose or have used Latin expressions to state what I could of the author's meaning according to my ability).

While all this is true no author is in every respect a competent expositor of his own method. In the second section of this essay, we compare the two Latin translations of the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, in order to show that the aim of Sarracenus was not only to improve on Eriugena in simplicity and accuracy, but also to adapt his work to a new intellectual climate and to the practice of the cloister in his own day. This investigation of his aims will serve as an overture to the third section, in which we consider the more tendentious experiments of an author who partly translated and partly paraphrased the Latin of this treatise for the benefit of Carthusians in England.

## SARRACENUS VERSUS ERIUGENA

It is generally agreed, as we have said, that Sarracenus is more lucid than Eriugena. We have also remarked that at times his superiority in this respect would appear to be simply a consequence of his having a better manuscript of the Greek. The first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* furnishes us with a clear example, where the standard modern edition of Heil and Ritter (1991: 144.13–15) reads as follows:

τῷ παντελῶς δὲ ἀγνώστῳ τῇ πάσης γνώσεως ἀνενεργησίᾳ κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον ἐνούμενος καὶ τῷ μηδὲν γινώσκειν ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκων (united, however, to that which is wholly unknown, according to the better, by the non-working of all knowledge, and having a knowledge superior to mind by virtue of knowing nothing).

This is clearly the text that is rendered, faithfully enough, by Sarracenus (Chevalier 1937: 578):

Omnino autem ignoto vacatione omnis cognitionis secundum melius unitus, et eo quod nihil cognoscit super mentem cognoscens (united, however, according to the better, to that which is wholly unknown by the abeyance of all cognition, and having a knowledge superior to that of mind by the fact that it knows nothing).

A closer approximation to the Greek could be achieved by writing *nihil cognoscendo* in place of the cumbersome *eo quod nihil cognoscit*. Eriugena did indeed use the gerundive, but in a manner that yields neither good sense in Latin nor a tolerable equivalent to the Greek text as we know it (*Patrologia Latina* 122: 1174b):

Omnino autem ignoto omni scientia in otio per id quod melius est intellectus, et nihil cognoscendum super animum sic cognoscentium (understood by that which is



wholly unknown through that which is better, with all knowledge in abeyance, and nothing superior to the mind of those with such knowledge is knowable).

The perfect participle *intellectus* must be translating  $\text{not } \acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$  but  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\upsilon\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ , a patently inferior reading not attested in the *apparatus criticus* of Ritter and Suchla. As the terminal word in the Greek he must have read  $\gamma\iota\nu\omega\sigma\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\omega\nu$  rather than  $\gamma\iota\nu\omega\sigma\kappa\omega\nu$ , though what he thought his own translation meant we cannot say.

Sarracenus also gains in perspicuity by declining to follow his predecessor's attempts to retain grammatical constructions which are possible only in Greek. Eriugena had already elected to spare his readers the macaronic syntax of the original, in which adjectives are often separated from the nouns with which they agree by some other word whose place in the sentence can be determined only when we have sought out the distant verb or noun to which it is related. But while the structure of his sentences may therefore have been less perplexing to those whose native tongue was French or Irish, readers who had a sound grasp of Latin accident will have been troubled by the discord between the gender of the noun and that of the corresponding epithets in the first sentence of the *Mystical Theology* (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1171–1173a):

Trinitas superessentialis, et superdeus, et superoptime Christianorum inspector theosophiae, dirige nos in mysticorum eloquiorum superincognitum et superlucentem et sublimissimum verticem (Superessential Trinity, superdivine and superexcellent judge of the theosophy of Christians, guide us to the superincognoscible and superluminous and most sublime summit of mystical discourse).

*Trinitas* is the conventional equivalent of *trias* in Latin theology, both words being feminine in gender, though the Greek, at once less technical and more generic, has sometimes lent itself to the tritheism which the Latin coinage was designed to exclude. In Dionysius, as in Eriugena, the adjectives have masculine terminations (Heil and Ritter 1991: 141):

Τριάς ὑπερούσιε καὶ ὑπέρθεε καὶ ὑπεράγαθε, τῆς Χριστιανῶν ἔφορε θεοσοφίας ἴθυνον ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν μυστικῶν λογίων ὑπεράγνωστον καὶ ὑπερφαῖ καὶ ἀκροτάτην κορυφήν· (Supersubstantial Trinity, and superdivine and superbeneficent, judge of the theosophy of Christians, guide us to the superunknown and superluminous and loftiest summit of mystical discourse).

The reason for this, however, is that in Greek it is conventional for the masculine ending to subsume the feminine in compound adjectives. Sarracenus takes the commonsensical view that one should write Latin as though it were Latin, even at the cost of seeming to intimate that the Godhead is a feminine being superior to the masculine *deus* of ordinary usage (Chevalier 1937: 565):

Trinitas supersubstantialis et superdea et superbona, inspectrix divinae sapientiae Christianorum, dirige nos ad mysticorum eloquiorum superignotum et supersplendentem et summum verticem (Supersubstantial Trinity, and superdivine

and superbeneficent, judge of the divine wisdom of Christians, guide us to the superunknown and super-resplendent and loftiest summit of mystical discourse).

The orthodoxy of the term *ὑπερθεός* is not our present concern; that Sarracenus adopts the same translation as Eriugena (but for the ending) is a sign not so much of dependence as of their common fidelity to the prototype. His choice of *superignotum* rather than *superincognitum* may be ascribed to his distaste for recondite terms where a more familiar one will serve him. On the same principle he eschews the word *gnosticus*, which Eriugena borrowed from the Greek, like other before him, in the belief that no word native to Latin would convey the same meaning. On the other hand, where Eriugena had already employed a more quotidian term, Sarracenus is glad to imitate him. Both, for example, substitute Latin *mysticus* for Greek *mystikos*, but they concur in the choice of *indoctus* as a synonym for the cognate term *amuētos*, so that no sense remains of initiation into a secret teaching (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173a):

DIONYSIUS (Heil and Ritter 1991: 142.12): Τούτων δὲ ὄρα, ὅπως μηδεὶς τῶν ἀμυήτων ἐπακούσῃ· (See, however, that none of the uninitiated hears these things).

ERIUGENA (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173a): His autem vide quomodo nemo indoctorum auscultet (See, however, that none of the unlearned should give ear to these teachings).

SARRACENUS (Chevalier 1937: 569): Vide autem ut nullus indoctorum ista audiat (See, however, that none of the unlearned should hear these teachings).

The momentous consequence of this decision was that Nicholas of Cusa, who appears to have been acquainted with both translations, characterized the knowledge of the unknown God as *docta ignorantia*, a 'learned ignorance', in the title of his most celebrated work.

Another famous book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, might have borne a different title had Sarracenus not endorsed Eriugena's use of *caligo*, 'mist', as his equivalent to *γνόφος*, the term which Dionysius borrowed from the Septuagint to represent the darkness into which we enter when we begin to know God. The noun is less current in classical Greek than other words for darkness, such as *σκότος*; it was also, as John of Scythopolis observed, replaced in Symmachus' revision of the Septuagint by *ὁμίχλη*, which is better translated as 'mist'.<sup>3</sup> Jerome, preferring Symmachus to the Septuagint, adopted *caligo* as his own translation of the Hebrew. It is reasonable to presume that both Eriugena and Sarracenus, recognizing the scriptural provenance of the term *γνόφος*, elected not to give a direct translation but to substitute the word that appears in the Vulgate. Thus, where the Greek is:

DIONYSIUS (Heil and Ritter 1991: 244–245): Καὶ τότε καὶ αὐτῶν ἀπολύεται τῶν ὀρωμένων καὶ τῶν ὁρώντων καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας εἰσδύνει τὸν ὄντως μυστικόν (And then he also is released from the seen and the seeing, and enters the darkness of unknowing which is truly mystical).

ERIUGENA writes (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1174a):

Et quod ipsis absolvitur visibilibus et invisibilibus, et in caliginem ignorantiae occidit vere mysticam (And because he is released from the things that are visible and invisible, and falls into the truly mystical cloud of unknowing).

while Sarracenus differs little (Chevalier 1937: 577):

Tunc et ab ipsis absolvitur visis et videntibus, et ad caliginem ignorantiae intrat, quae caligo vere est mystica (Then he is also released from the seen and the seeing, and enters into the cloud of unknowing, which is the truly mystic cloud).

A further example of a common choice by Sarracenus and Eriugena against the literal meaning of the Greek is their translation of *atheos* as a description of pagan statues. In the original, there can be no doubt that the author has in mind the idols of the pagan world, still visible in his own time and rife in that of the true Areopagite, a contemporary of Paul (Heil and Ritter 1991: 142.16–143.3):

τί ἂν τις φαίη περὶ τῶν μᾶλλον ἀμύστων, ὅσοι τὴν πάντων ὑπερκειμένην αἰτίαν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐσχάτων χαρακτηρίζουσιν καὶ οὐδὲν αὐτὴν ὑπερέχειν φασὶ τῶν πλαττομένων αὐτοῖς ἀθέων καὶ πολυειδῶν μορφωμάτων; (What is one to say of those still more uninitiate, who represent the cause that lies above all things even from things which are least of those in existence, and say that it is in no wise superior to the godless and multiform figures of their own fashioning?).

‘Godless’ as an atheist in antiquity was seldom, if ever, a person who believed that no gods exist, but one who failed to engage in proper acts of worship. Pagans threw this calumny at the Christians who would not frequent their own temples; from the time of Polycarp, Christians had retorted it upon those who worshipped every god but the true one. In the times of Eriugena and Sarracenus, however, there was no worship of images other than that which was sanctioned by the Church; if one was not a Christian, one was either a Jew or a Muslim, and in either case an adherent of a faith that condemned such worship as idolatry. The Latin translators therefore agree in writing *impius*, a term which might apply even to those who were orthodox in both belief and cult:

ERIUGENA (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173b): quid quis dixerit de aliis ardentibus, quicumque omnibus superpositam causam ex ipsis in his quae sunt novissimis characterizant, et nihil eam superare aiunt ab ipsis fictarum *impietatum* et multiformium formationum? (What is one to say of other zealots, who represent the cause which is placed above all things by the very least of those things that exist, and say that it is in no wise superior to the impieties and multiform formations of their own fashioning?).

SARRACENUS (Chevalier 1937: 570): Quid dicat quidem aliquis de magis indoctis, quicumque omnibus superpositam causam et ex postremis in existentibus figurant, et nihil ipsam habere dicunt super compositas ab ipsis *impias* et multiformes formationes? (What indeed is someone to say of the more unlearned, who depict the cause that is placed above all things by the last of the things that exist, and say that it has no properties but those of the impious and multiform formations that they themselves have composed?).

We may wonder whom the medieval reader would suppose to be the object of this sally. Would he think himself back into the world of the Apostles—a feat of which few, to judge by the *Gesta Romanorum*, were capable? In the Frankish sphere of Eriugena, he might think of the *Libri Carolini*, which had been penned by Charlemagne, or on his behalf, against the iconophiles who had won a transient though decisive victory at the Second Nicene Council of 787. In the age of Sarracenus the use of images was lawful throughout the West, though if he was indeed a Saracen by birth, he may have secretly entertained his own view of the question. His English translator, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, performs his own exegesis when he denies that mental images have any part in the quest for ecstatic knowledge (Hodgson 1982: 59). How far these Evagrian sentiments already informed the thought of Dionysius himself is a topic of debate, and we cannot even be sure that he was a monk.

It may be familiarity with the monastic tradition that prompted the most egregious departure of Sarracenus from Eriugena and the Greek:

DIONYSIUS (Heil and Ritter 1991: 142.5–7): σὺ δέ, ὦ φίλε Τιμόθεε, τῇ περὶ τὰ μυστικὰ θεάματα συντόνῳ διατριβῇ καὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἀπόλειπε καὶ τὰς νοεράς ἐνεργείας. (Now, dear Timothy, in the assiduous pursuit of mystical speculations, must abandon both the senses and the intellectual moperations).

ERIUGENA (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173a): Tu autem, o amice Timothee, circa mysticas speculationes corroborato itinere et sensus desere et intellectuales operationes (Now, friend Timothy, with respect to mystical speculations you must firmly take the path of renouncing the senses and intellectual operations).

SARRACENUS (Chevalier 1937: 567): Tu autem, o amice Timothee, circa mysticas visiones forti contritione et sensus derelinque et intellectuales operationes (Now, friend Timothy, with respect to mystical visions you must forsake with deep contrition both the senses and the intellectual operations).

If the Latin *contritio* has its usual sense (the one that its derivative ‘contrition’ bears in English, Sararcenus has plainly misconstrued the Greek. The root of the Latin word, however, like that of διατριβή, signifies ‘grinding’, and the verb *contero*, to which the noun *contritio* is related, retains that sense when Augustine speaks of philosophers who ‘ground away at their studies’ (*studia contriverint*; *City of God* 8.10). Albert the Great explains the noun in light of the verb when commenting on this passage.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it is possible that the intention of Sarracenus was to adapt his text to the pattern of medieval spirituality, in which the purgative way precedes the way of illumination.<sup>5</sup> Certainly the English author of *Denys Hid Divinite* took the word *contritio* to connote ‘repentance’, as does Thomas Gallus when in glossing this passage he urges that the soul should be *purgatus ab ultimis animae fantasiis tam spiritalis quam divinas operationes postponendo*, that is ‘purged from the last conceits of soul, by putting behind it both spiritual and divine operations’ (McEvoy 2003: 22).

Sarracenus cannot be so easily acquitted of misunderstanding, or rather of mere incomprehension, when he has to construe a passage which requires some training in philosophy:

Τοῦτο δὲ οἶμαι σημαίνειν τὸ τὰ θειότατα καὶ ἀκρότατα τῶν ὁρωμένων καὶ νοουμένων ὑποθετικούς τινας εἶναι λόγους τῶν ὑποβεβλημένων τῷ πάντα ὑπερέχοντι, (This I take to signify that the most divine and sublime objects of vision and intelligence are, as it were, hypothetical presentations of the things subjected to him who is master of all).

To understand the meaning of ὑποθετικούς, we must turn to Plato's *Republic* (510b), where the mathematicians are ridiculed for ascribing an absolute truth to their hypotheses, which in fact are of value only as preliminary studies to the dialectical exercise of reason. Neoplatonic writings on arithmetic tell us that mathematical diagrams were purposely employed by the Pythagoreans as propaedeutics to higher truths which cannot be imparted to the novice (Festa 1975: 19–20). Thus 'adumbratory' might be the most serviceable equivalent for the Greek term, though I have not seen this in any English rendering. Eriugena follows the method recommended in an ironic tale by Borges, simply transliterating the Greek (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173d):

Hoc autem arbitror significare divinissima et sublimissima visibilium et intelligibilium ypotheticas esse sermones subjectorum omnia superanti (Now this I take to signify that the most divine and sublime of things visible and intelligible are hypothetic expressions of things subject to the one who is master of all).

Sarracenus returns to the Greek by writing *visorum et intellectorum* rather than *visibilium et intelligibilium*. On the other hand, he not only fails to convey the sense of the ensuing words but commits the solecism of using the same Latin word to translate two different Greek words in the same clause (Chevalier 1937: 576):

Hoc autem puto significare, divinissima visorum et intellectorum esse quasdam subjectas rationes subjectorum omnia excedenti (Now this I take to signify that the most divine objects of sense and intelligence are as it were subject principles of things subject to the one who is master of all).

In chapter 3 he repents of his parsimony, rendering *hypothetica* as *suppositiva*; even this, however, would be a better translation of ὑποκείμενον. Elsewhere, he has improved on Eriugena in representing καθαρός not by *purus* but by *mundus*, which, because Latin can also supply the verb *mundari*, enables him to mimic the etymological relation between *katharos* and *kathareuein* in the original. It is not clear whether he or Eriugena does better when they disagree in their parsing of an ambiguous sentence which contains the adverb καθαρως:

DIONYSIUS (Heil and Ritter 1991: 142.9–11): τῇ γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ πάντων ἀσχέςτῳ καὶ ἀπολύτῳ καθαρῶς ἐκστάσει πρὸς τὴν ὑπερούσιον τοῦ θεοῦ σκότους ἀκτίνα, πάντα ἀφελὼν καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἀπολυθείς, ἀναχθήσῃ (You will be led by a purely untrammelled ecstasy, beyond your grasp and that of all men, towards the supersubstantial radiance of the divine darkness, having done away all things and been freed of all).

ERIUGENA (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173a): Ea enim teipso et omnibus immensurabili et absolute puro mentis excessu (Go indeed with an ecstasy of mind which is absolutely pure, beyond your grasp, and that of all men).

SARRACENUS (Chevalier 1937: 568): Etenim excessu tui ipsius et omnium irretentibili et absoluto, munde ad supersubstantialem divinarum tenebrarum radium, cuncta auferens et a cunctis absolutus, sursumageris (And indeed you will be led purely, by an untrammelled ecstasy, beyond your grasp and that of all men, to the supersubstantial radiance of the divine darkness).

While one understands the sentence to be speaking of a purity inherent in the objects of supranoetic knowledge, the other reads it as an exhortation to cultivate purity in the seeking of this knowledge. It is characteristic of the monk Sarracenus to have made the second choice, but we cannot say in this case that it belies the true sense of the text. We can surely say at least that he is offering his own version of the Greek and not merely pruning the syntax and vocabulary of his Latin predecessor. The same inference is warranted when he replaces an unsatisfactory rendering of ἀνομμάτους νόας with a phrase of quite different import, admittedly one that comes no closer to capturing the sense:

DIONYSIUS (Heil and Ritter 1991: 142.3–4): καὶ ἐν τῷ πάμπαν ἀναφεῖ καὶ ἀοράτῳ τῶν ὑπερκάλων ἀγλαῖων ὑπερπληροῦντα τοὺς ἀνομμάτους νόας (and in the inapprehensible and invisible over-replenishing eyeless intellects with superbeauteous glories).

ERIUGENA (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173a): et invisibilibus superbonorum splendoribus superimplentem invisibiles intellectus (and over-replenishing invisible intellects with the invisible splendours of the supernally good).

SARRACENUS (Chevalier 1937: 566): et in omnino impalpabili et invisibili superpulchris claritatibus superimplentem non habentes oculos mentis (and in that which is wholly intangible and invisible over-replenishing with superbeauteous glories those who have not the eyes of the mind).

In one case his departure from Eriugena is decidedly for the worse. The required translation is one that will preserve the author's wordplay on Logos as a title of Christ and as the standard Greek for articulate discourse:

DIONYSIUS (Heil and Ritter 1991: 143.10–12): καὶ πολὺλόγος ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγαθὴ πάντων αἰτία καὶ βραχύλεκτος ἅμα καὶ ἄλογος, ὥς οὔτε λόγον οὔτε νόησιν ἔχουσα. (The good cause of all is at once rich in words and short in speech, and wordless at the same time, as there is neither word nor concept of it).

ERIUGENA follows the Vulgate in translating Logos as *verbum*, or “word”, throughout (*Patrologia Latina* 122, 1173c): Multiloqua est optima omnium causa, et brevilloqua simul, et sine verbo, quomodo neque verbum neque intelligentiam habet (The supreme cause of all is rich speech and also short in speech, and without word, inasmuch as there is neither word nor understanding of it).

SARRACENUS, by contrast, has (Chevalier 1937: 572): Multorum sermonum est bona omnium causa, et brevium dictionum, simul et irrationabilis, sicut neque rationem habens neque intellectum (The good cause of all is rich in speech and short in expressions, and at the same time without reason, as there is neither reason nor understanding of it).



Tertullian had observed (*Against Praxeas* 5) that the active character of the Logos in the Fourth Gospel is better expressed by Latin *sermo* ('speech'), and his indefeasible presence in the Father by *ratio* ('reason'). Sarracenus, however, in representing *alogos* by *irrationalis*, has not only disguised the semantic artifice but has failed to communicate that when speech ends, this reveals the insolvency of reason on our part rather than any want of it in the object. He has also effected a dubious simplification by adopting words of different etymologies to represent the πολυλογός and βραχύλεκτος of the original, which was clearly designed to convey a paradox; Eriugena accentuates this paradox by adopting terms that perfectly mirror each other, whereas Sarracenus waters it down to the trite remark that a multitude of speeches may be composed of brief expressions. Here as elsewhere Sarracenus has presented the Western Church with a text more readable than that of Eriugena; the text that he and the Irishman had before them, however, is not one that gains in pedagogic rigour when its obscurities are purged.

## SARRACENUS CROSSES THE CHANNEL

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The Renaissance produced new versions of the Dionysian corpus, and Sarracenus is only one of four translators collated by Johannes Eck (1519) in his commentary on the *Mystical Theology*. An accessible edition of his entire work first appeared as part of a compilation in Chevalier 1937.<sup>6</sup> His *Mystical Theology*, however, has been accessible since 1924 as an appendix to McCann's scholarly edition of the Middle English classic *The Cloud of Unknowing* (McCann 1924). In a short text by this author, entitled *Denys Hid Divinite*, the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* is translated with some freedom (though not, as we shall see, with unbridled licence) from the Latin of Sarracenus. We shall argue that the author (who is commonly thought to be male, and a Carthusian) had before him the glosses of Thomas Gallus on the *Mystical Theology* (McEvoy 2003). These glosses furnished the latter not only with hints towards the embellishment of the Latin of Sarracenus, but with bold examples of didactic freedom, whether his object was to facilitate understanding or to further the application of the metaphysical doctrine. Being both a fine writer and a great teacher, the Carthusian seized this freedom with both hands, as will be evident if we pause over the first and most original of his strokes before going on to some deviations from the Latin which reveal his familiarity with the glosses.

We have noted that the prayer with which Sarracenus opens the *Mystical Theology* might have been construed unwarily to imply either that God is female or that the Trinity is superior to God. Gallus pre-empts both errors in his pleonastic revision (McEvoy 2003: 18):

O trina unitas et una trinitas videlicet personarum, superexcedens omne ens quo ad personam patris et superexcedens omnem scientiam et sapientiam quae ad personam Filii, et superexcedens omnem existentem bonitatem quo ad personam Spiritus.



(O threefold unity and unique trinity of persons, greatly surpassing all that exists in the person of the Father, greatly surpassing all knowledge and wisdom in the person of the Son, and greatly surpassing all goodness in the person of the Spirit).

By contrast, the reader of *Denys Hid Divinite* is permitted to imagine that the object of the apostrophe is no god but a goddess, whose name is Wisdom:<sup>7</sup>

Thou unbigonne & euerlastyng Wysdome, the whiche in thiself arte the souereyn-substantial Firstheed, the souereyn Goddesse, & the souereyn Good

It may be more than an accident that Wisdom supplants Philosophy as the author's interlocutor in King Alfred's translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius (Irvine and Godden 2012: 12 etc.). But whereas it would seem that Alfred was hoping to cast himself as the English Solomon, the aim of the Middle English author must rather be to inculcate the same lesson that is inculcated by Solomon at Proverbs 8.22—that wisdom below is an echo of wisdom above and that acts of love are a working out within the creature of the same love that is at work in the outward creation. It is possible that the author knew something of Origen, who not only celebrates the soul's marriage to Wisdom in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, but enumerates the five spiritual senses in a plain and concrete manner that we notice again in *Denys Hid Divinite*, though it has no warrant either in Sarracenus or in the glosses of Gallus. Nevertheless, some knowledge of the latter may be apparent in two of the Englishman's additions to the assault on those whose minds are unweaned from images (Hodgson 1982: 121):

And sithen, bi witnes of the prophete, the godliche techynges of thees privitytees ben abouen these men, what schul we sey then of thoo that ben more unwise, wonyng yit not only in here goostly wittes of natureel philosophy, but lowe downe benethe in here bodily wittes, the whiche thei hauen bot in comoun with only beestes?

Gallus had expanded Sarracenus to read *existimantes quod nihil est super ens quod dicitur subiectum metaphysicae, tam creata quam increata continens*, that is 'supposing that there is nothing superior to that which is, which is called the subject of metaphysics, containing the created no less than the uncreated' (McEvoy 2003: 24). A little later, *Denys Hid Divinite* likens those who cherish images to the beasts, again without precedent in the text of Sarracenus. Gallus, however, accused these sophomores of believing that God could be known as he is *per investigationem creaturarum, quae eis connaturalis est* ('by the examination of creatures, which is proper to their own nature') and of fabricating images *quae inferiora sunt animatis*, 'which are less than brutes' (McEvoy 2003: 24).

In another place, the English author reproduces his syntax where it is not entirely of a piece with that of Sarracenus. In the following sentence, the referent of the pronoun *hoc* is elusive, but it can certainly not be *locus*, since this is a masculine noun and *hoc* is neuter (Chevalier 1937: 575–576):

Contemplamur non ipsum (invisibilis est enim), sed locum ubi est. Hoc autem puto significare, divinissimas visorum et intellectorum esse subiectas quasdam rationes, etc.

Gallus, by contrast, clearly identifies the creatures with the seat of God (McEvoy 2003: 30):

Dictum est Deum non videri, sed locum ubi est, id est in creaturis quibusdam quae dicuntur eo divinissima subiecta visu et intellectu vel divinissima loca, quia nihil divinius intuemur (It is said that it is not God who is seen, but the place where he is, that is [he is seen] in certain creatures which are said to be the most divine things subjected to him in vision and intellect, or the most divine places, because nothing more divine is open to our contemplation).

The English text translates Sarracenus, not Gallus, to yield a sense which is that of Gallus, not Sarracenus (Hodgson 1982: 123):

Bot he had in contemplacioun an obiect not himself, for he may not be seen by that iye. Bot the place where he was, that was his obiecte.

The separation of Moses from the priests is another motif which the English writer derives only indirectly from Sarracenus through his annotator (McEvoy 2003: 30):

GALLUS: Postea Moyses separatur ab his qui secum locum Dei viderant, id est ab omnibus intelligibilibus operationibus (Thereafter Moses is separated from those who saw the place of God with him, that is from all intelligible operations).

ENGLISH: In this tyme it was that Moyses in syngulertee of affeccioun was departid from these beforeseyde chosen preestes, and entrid by hymself the derknes of vnknowyng.

We may note the perverse independence of the translation 'darkness of unknowing', notwithstanding the author's use of 'cloud' in the title of his best-known work. It is also typical of him that he does not reduce the priests to operations and that he cultivates a more colloquial style which is suited to pastoral counselling rather than philosophic exposition. He has least in common with Gallus when translating the metaphysical excursus in which Dionysius says that the most sublime objects of the intellect are no more than adumbrations of the true Good. Gallus (McEvoy 2003: 30) seems to divine that the Latin of Sarracenus obscures an original notion of:

summos et aeternos archetypas sive rationes aut exemplaria omnium creaturarum Deo subiectarum, per quas Deus fit praesens et cognitione nobis manifestatum (sublime and eternal archetypes, otherwise principles or exemplars of all the creatures subject to God, through which God becomes present and manifest to us by knowledge).

The Carthusian, on the other hand, is pictorial rather than metaphysical, homely and expansive in his diction (Hodgson 1982: 123):

And that place betokenith the hiyest godliche beholdynges, passing abouen and having in subieccioun alle mans resons, as the lady hath her maydens. By the whiche godliche beholdynges the presence of him that is abouen alle thinking is souereynly schewid to mans understandynges, and setteth hym abouen the natureel termes of himself.

The intrusion of the lady, for whom there is no antecedent in Gallus or Sarracenus, is another licence granted to himself by the translator, of a piece with his conversion of the poem into an invocation of Wisdom. England at that time boasted a flourishing cult of the Virgin Mary, to whom two of Oxford's oldest colleges were dedicated, while her shrine at Walsingham had been founded before the Norman Conquest. The Englishman is not a scholar, nor even a scholastic: writing in his own tongue for his own flock, he did not feel bound to copy only what he had found in Sarracenus or in Gallus. But they too were explorers and innovators, men of their age as Dionysius had been a man of his. The Dionysian tradition of the Western Middle Ages owes much of its vitality to the latitude of translation, or as some would now say to its errors; by contrast, the revival of academic interest in the same tradition is sustained by a continual reappraisal of the mediating texts which stand between us and the original Dionysius. We are not wrong to apply our own canons of purity, but neither can we deny these verbal alchemists of the Middle Ages a right to their own titrations. If this Christian Neoplatonist can live for us now, it is because he has lived in them.

## NOTES

1. Théry 1948: 372, pointing out that Sarracenus retains *aenigmata*, *hagiographia*, and *hymnologia*.
2. Cited by Théry 1948: 373.
3. Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998: 244–245.
4. Blankenhorn 2015: 167–168: *quasi conterendo sub lumine divino*.
5. This nomenclature in fact originates in the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius, where it defines three orders of angels.
6. Fortunate libraries will possess the edition of Chevalier which appears in *Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia*, vol. 16 (Tournai, 1902). In 2010 Brepols made Sarracenus available in their electronic resource, the Library of Latin texts.
7. Hodgson 1982: 119. Sarracenus had already introduced *sapientia* as a substitute for the *theosophia* of Eriugena.

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## CHAPTER 22

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# ROBERT GROSSETESTE, TRANSLATOR OF DIONYSIUS

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DECLAN LAWELL

ROBERT Grosseteste was born around 1175. Scientist, linguist, philosopher, and theologian, he lectured the Franciscans in their house in Oxford around 1230, and may also have been appointed chancellor of the university. One of his most famous pupils was Roger Bacon. He eventually became Bishop of Lincoln, and it was between 1239 and 1241/42 that he translated the four main works of the Dionysius, along with the accompanying Scholia, and composed his own commentaries on the texts. He died on 9 October 1253.<sup>1</sup>

## GROSSETESTE THE TRANSLATOR

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With Robert Grosseteste, the medieval Latin appropriation of the thought of Dionysius reaches a level of textual expertise and conceptual insight that is unparalleled. Grosseteste learned the Greek language when nearing sixty years old and this knowledge is everywhere evident in his commentaries on Dionysius. He brought a command of the Greek language which enabled him not just to enter more fully into the mind of Dionysius, but also to put the spotlight on the various textual errors that arose from previous translators and copyists of the Dionysian corpus.

In his commentaries, Grosseteste published firstly his own new translations of the Dionysian writings. To these were appended his translation of the Scholia which had accrued to the text. Finally, he added his own commentary. In order to give prominence to the primary text, his translation of Dionysius and the Scholia (on Robert's explicit instruction) were to be written in a larger font size than his commentary. While his translation never enjoyed the same diffusion and popularity as other translations of Dionysius, they are nevertheless remarkable for Grosseteste's attempt to get as close as

possible to the mind of the author through the use of Greek. He was intensely aware of the advantages this knowledge of Greek gave him:

Hence, the commentator on this book [namely *Celestial Hierarchy*], not having or not knowing that it was written in Greek, when he meets difficulties of this kind, must of necessity for the most part be ignorant of the author's intention in these difficulties ... As a result, although those ignorant of the Greek language, when explaining ambiguities of this kind, may at times utter truths and points more profound than those who know the same language, nevertheless they cannot give preference to themselves over those who are not ignorant of that language ...<sup>2</sup>

The first work Grosseteste commented on was the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and in the Prologue to that work, he gives an exposition of his *modus operandi* in all subsequent commentaries.<sup>3</sup> He begins by explaining various points concerning the pronunciation of Greek, for example, that there are two Greek letters for 'ē', one long and the other short. To make the difference evident, Grosseteste chose to write long 'ē' by the capital H (representing eta in Greek). Omega he chose to represent as 'oo'. This enables him to accurately transliterate and explain Greek words for his Latin readership.

He then goes on to explain how there are many composite phrases in Greek which have no equivalent in Latin. Grosseteste acknowledges that a translator may have to render such composite phrases with multiple words in Latin. However, he does insist that although such Latin composites (which he makes up and inserts freely in his commentaries to explain to readers how they would look in Latin) lose out on Latinity and fluid style, nevertheless they gain more in terms of how accurately they represent the mind of the Greek author. In chapter 2, for example, he explains how his Latin translation *ferina formatio* (animal shape) is a single phrase in Greek—*thHromorfia*. He then goes on to break this word down (as he does in the rest of this passage for a whole series of terms), by explaining how *thHromorfia* comes 'from "thHr", of which the genitive is "thHros", which is a "beast" or "wild animal", and "morphH", which is "shape"'.<sup>4</sup>

Grosseteste thus had the linguistic expertise to make some accurate corrections of previous translations, or indeed if not of translators then of the manuscript tradition:

Some writers, for that word which we have put here as 'to have known' [*cognovisse*], have translated 'to not know' [*ignorare*], which we do not believe happened due to the lack of knowledge of the translator but rather from the corruption of his manuscript copy in which perhaps in place of 'ēgnōkenai', which is 'cognovisse', there was written 'ēgnōkenai', which is 'ignorasse'. That which we have written here by two words, 'bonam ordinationem', in Greek is only one word, 'eutaxia'.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly there is a great difference between 'knowing' and 'not knowing', and it is Grosseteste's profound linguistic expertise which enables him to get close to the original text. Such instances of him correcting translations or conjecturing about manuscript corruptions abound in his commentaries. Combined with his knowledge of rhetorical devices (he mentions the use of hyperbaton, and at one point references

the amphibology<sup>6</sup> of a certain phrase), such technical apparatus makes the reader feel that he or she is in the presence of an expert translator who can conjecture the correct reading of a Greek text and render that in as faithful Latin as possible. The reader also sees how he used the Greek dictionaries (*in parcionariis Grecorum*)<sup>7</sup> such as the Suda encyclopedia or the Gudanium (an etymological encyclopedia) to research Greek terms. Grosseteste also used some academic assistants to aid his research, as he mentions towards the end of his *Celestial Hierarchy* commentary.

## GROSSETESTE THE COMMENTATOR ON DIONYSIUS

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Grosseteste is by no means a dry analyst of texts who confines himself to lexical analysis. It is also on the conceptual plane that he shows evidence of a deep insight into the Dionysian world view. Any interpreter of Dionysius needs to account for the upward return of creation or the soul via the three ways of purgation, illumination, and perfection. For Grosseteste, Dionysian perfection lies firmly on the intellectual plane and consists in the perfect exercise of the virtues (or powers) of the soul. By virtue, Grosseteste means the powers or operations of the soul—he is thus not referring primarily to ethical virtues. Thus, the intellect is a power of the soul and is activated when something is understood. Grosseteste is at pains to repeat this point in several locations. For example, in chapter 5 of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, he writes about Dionysius when referring to these ‘virtues’:

In Greek . . . is found not ‘aretai’, which is moral virtues, but ‘dynameis’, which is properly ‘powers’ or ‘natural virtues’.<sup>8</sup>

What then is the perfect exercise of the virtues (which I shall render as powers) of the soul? Grosseteste in chapter 3 of the *Celestial Hierarchy* explains:

But to be perfected, or to be consummated, happens through the exercise (*operaciones*) of the powers (*virtutum*), or through the exercise of the best power. Now to be happy is to be perfect. Yet happiness is exercise in accordance with this power, or according to the best of the powers in the perfect life. But perfect happiness is the speculative or contemplative exercise about the best things, namely the unity and Trinity of the godhead.<sup>9</sup>

In line with John Sarrazenus (John Sarrazen)<sup>10</sup>, and in line with other Dionysian commentators such as Aquinas and Albert<sup>11</sup>, Grosseteste thus sees perfection for the human soul as the intellectual or speculative contemplation of God. When the soul exercises its power to know the best object of the intellect, namely God, then that soul is completely fulfilled and happy since it is exercising its highest power (intellect) on



the highest object (God). Again, while Grosseteste praises the human who lives by the political virtues, and even more so the person who lives the contemplative or intellectual life, he states firmly that 'above all and in the most excellent way, a human is said to be one who lives according to the highest of the speculative powers, which is wisdom i.e. a knowledge of the divinity itself'.<sup>12</sup> As a final example of his intellectual emphasis on the perfection of the human, Grosseteste affirms that perfection is directing all the operations or exercises of one's soul to that which is the goal of all things, 'namely, the pure contemplation of the divinity, which is the ultimate and greatest perfection of a rational creature'.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of this discussion on perfection, it can now be noted how the two lower levels, purgation and illumination, are preparatory for this intellectual perfection. One way of considering purgation for Grosseteste is by noting how he views it as correctly ordered love. Those who are purified thus direct their affections to acquiring a knowledge of what is good and true, a knowledge which arrives on the level of illumination. Grosseteste in chapter 3 writes that it is necessary for those purified 'to love nothing which ought not be loved, or love anything differently from how it ought to be loved'.<sup>14</sup> In another passage from chapter 15, Grosseteste defines purgation as follows:

But purgation is the light itself which is God, which is purity and chasteness in itself, which coming into the intellect conforms the intellect to itself ... Hence, purgation considered in itself is said to be conformity of the intellect with eternal purity ...<sup>15</sup>

Purgation thus entails affective and intellectual dimensions—it is a love that is correctly ordered towards the reception of intellectual illumination; it is also the conformity of the intellect with the supreme purity which is God. In short, purgation is the abolition of any *amoris inordinatio* or 'disorder of love', an abolition which results not just in the correct orientation of the power of love to God but also brings a properly adjusted intellectual orientation, since any disorder in love 'makes the affect (*affectum*) distorted and the intellect (*aspectum*) darkened'.<sup>16</sup>

What then of illumination? Grosseteste stresses how this occurs through knowledge and through the exercise of the powers of the soul: 'Illumination however occurs through the powers and knowledge, or simply through the powers, since under the term "power", spoken in general with regard to both active and speculative powers, is included all knowledge of practical action and of knowledge directed towards its own best end'.<sup>17</sup> This is the realm of intellectual enlightenment gained from either revelation (doctrine, Scripture, traditions) or natural philosophical learning about the divine.

How then does this differ from perfection, which Grosseteste described as the exercise of the highest power on its highest object, namely the soul when knowing God? Perfection seems to be the ingrained habit of being able to consider God constantly—it is a knowledge perfected not just by a looking with the mind's eye, but a habitual action (*frequentata actio*).<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Grosseteste explains that those perfected are perfected 'not just by a cognitive knowledge of the sacred things that have been inspected but also by an experiential

one, received and impressed upon them by the completely sacred doctrine of the things that make perfect'.<sup>19</sup> The use of the phrase *scientia experimentalis* or 'experiential knowledge' is striking. From the pen of Thomas Gallus, who maintained that love was a faculty of knowing far superior to the intellect (a view thus at odds with Grosseteste), this phrase would refer to the knowledge that comes from the experience of love. What does it mean for Grosseteste? In chapter 4, he explains how this perfect knowledge of the hierarchies comes 'not just in knowledge (*agnicione*) but in the experience of operating from an ordered power'.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, Grosseteste is saying that those perfected do not just know something about the divine, but that such knowledge is deeply ingrained. It is not just a fact acknowledged in a fleeting manner by the mind, but one that is so entrenched that it is a routine experience which comes from a power (especially the intellect) which is correctly ordered to its proper end, namely the knowledge of God. Experience then is not a special type of revelation, but rather the habitual and experiential exercise of the powers of the soul. The idea that such knowledge is rooted, experienced as habitual, and not easily overturned (unlike perhaps someone who has doubts about a particular aspect of knowledge about God), is clearly what Grosseteste means by experience:

... to the extent that such knowledge is strengthened, so that it cannot in any way be diminished or abolished, and is thus turned into a habit, this is perfection.<sup>21</sup>

## LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE—*AFFECTUS* AND *ASPECTUS*

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Grosseteste saw a mutual interplay between love and knowledge in the upward ascent of the mind to God. While he certainly gave priority to the intellect, since the final goal of the mind is the intellectual contemplation of its supreme end, God, such a cognitive ascent is driven by the motor, so to speak, of love. *Affectus* refers to the human affect or seat of love and feeling, whereas *aspectus* (literally a look or gaze) refers to intellectual cognition and vision. In chapter 5 of his *Celestial Hierarchy* commentary, Grosseteste talks of how the higher angelic orders lead the lower ones 'to the divine to be contemplated, that is by vision, and embraced by the affect'.<sup>22</sup> The mutual envelopment of affect and knowledge is called a 'circulation' by Grosseteste:

Therefore, the celestial spirits naturally from their free will are striving towards conformity in the imitation of God, and from that striving (*conatu*) they see (*aspicientes*), and from that sight (*aspectu*) they are striving (*conantes*) again, and there is no end to this circulation (*circulacionis*).<sup>23</sup>

For Grosseteste, there is no fissure or separation between love and knowledge. They each reinforce each other—the more one strives to see, the more one sees, and the result of

that sight is the increased desire to see even further. Grosseteste's friend, Thomas Gallus, to a large extent accepted this mutual envelopment of love and knowledge, but in the end produced an original interpretation of Dionysius by giving the utmost importance to love and striving over intellect. In glossing the terms 'golden' and 'silver' in chapter 15 of *Celestial Hierarchy*, Grosseteste suggests how 'golden, because it has a brighter colour (*magis rubet*) signifies knowledge inasmuch as it is informed by the fervour of love, whereas silvery brightness signifies the light of knowledge considered per se'.<sup>24</sup> Again, this is interesting because for Gallus the bright red or gold colour indicated the fire of love which has precedence over the silver of knowledge. Love is a higher level for Gallus, whereas for Grosseteste the higher level is knowledge informed and accompanied, not superseded, by love.

Grosseteste is however content to sing the praises of the way of love—'love is the greatest of all things'<sup>25</sup>, and it is through the agency of love and desire that true knowledge can enter the soul. Love indeed can bring the soul to union with God 'when it [the spirit] clings to him alone in pure love'.<sup>26</sup> Such love for Grosseteste, however reminiscent of the way Gallus extolls the precedence of love, is always concomitant with knowledge and is the driver that brings knowledge to contemplate God.<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES

1. For further information on Grosseteste, see McEvoy 2000 and 1982, especially part two, chapter two on the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*.
2. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, Prologue, in Lawell 2015: 9 (l.267–273). All translations are my own. Work on editions of Grosseteste's commentaries on the *Divine Names* and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is presently continuing. The commentary on the *Mystical Theology* has been published by Gamba 1942. Gamba's edition has also been reprinted in McEvoy 2003.
3. For further information on Grosseteste's procedure in translation and commentary, see McEvoy 1998 and 2006. Grosseteste can be found on the website of the International Grosseteste Society: <https://grossetestesociety.org/>.
4. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 2 (Lawell p. 29–30, l.66–68).
5. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 6 (Lawell, p. 123, l.38–43).
6. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 2 (Lawell, p. 51, l.92).
7. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 1 (Lawell, p. 15, l.32).
8. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 5 (Lawell, p. 114, l.46–48).
9. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, Lawell, p. 79 (l.110–115).
10. See Lawell 2021 for a study of John Sarracenus' *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*.
11. A detailed study of the views of Aquinas and Albert, in contrast to those of Thomas Gallus, can be found in Lawell 2012.
12. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 4 (Lawell, p. 101, l.92–94).
13. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 3 (Lawell, p. 84, l.81–83).
14. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 3 (Lawell, p. 83, l.49–50).
15. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 13 (Lawell, p. 253, l.103–106).

16. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 3 (Lawell, p. 84, l.99).
17. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 3 (Lawell, p. 79, l.107–110).
18. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 3 (Lawell, p. 85, l.138–139).
19. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 3 (Lawell, p. 85–86, l.146–148).
20. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 4 (Lawell, p. 89, l.55–56).
21. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 7 (Lawell, p. 159, l.23–26).
22. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 5 (Lawell, p. 115, l.75–76).
23. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 4 (Lawell, p. 96, l.94–97).
24. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 15 (Lawell, p. 292, l.33–35).
25. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 5 (Lawell, p. 119, l.253).
26. Robert Grosseteste, *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 1 (Lawell, p. 17, l.90–91).
27. Grosseteste's debt to Gallus is more clearly seen in how he adopts Gallus' psychological interpretation of the nine angelic orders in which, for example, the Seraphim are equated with the soul's love, the Cherubim with knowledge, and so on, where each angelic order is identified with some faculty of the soul. See chapter 10 of his *Celestial Hierarchy* commentary (Lawell 2015: 215, ll.78–88).

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## CHAPTER 23

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# BONAVENTURE AND DIONYSIUS

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MONICA TOBON

BONAVENTURE was, in the view of J.-G. Bougerol, ‘without a doubt the most Dionysian mind of the Middle Ages’,<sup>1</sup> and his honorific of Seraphic Doctor, bestowed by Jean Gerson (1363–1429), reflects the centrality to his thought of the burning love he associated with the Dionysian Seraphim. He was neither the first nor the only member of the nascent Franciscan order to take an interest in the writings of Dionysius, his ‘master and father of fond memory’ at the University of Paris, Alexander of Hales,<sup>2</sup> being another. But he embraced them with a singular enthusiasm, due both to his reverence for this ‘perfect one’ to whom Paul taught wisdom that he concealed from others<sup>3</sup> and to the congeniality of Areopagitic doctrine to his own agenda. For him, Dionysius was the primary authority as regards contemplation,<sup>4</sup> and the Areopagite’s emphasis on dynamic, ecstatic, ordered love as the ground of creation and summit of the Christian life was perfectly suited to Bonaventure’s project of forging a distinctively Franciscan theological and spiritual synthesis centred on the ecstatic person of St Francis. A comparison of two passages, one from Bonaventure’s *Life of St Francis* (*Legenda maior*), the other from the *Divine Names* is illustrative:

By the Seraphic ardour of his desires, [Francis] was being borne aloft into God; and by his sweet compassion he was being transformed into him who chose to be crucified because of the excess of his love.<sup>5</sup>

That is why the great Paul, swept along by his eros for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’. Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself for God, possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved.<sup>6</sup>

So although Bonaventure’s direct citations of Dionysius number a mere 248 compared to more than three thousand of Augustine,<sup>7</sup> Dionysian elements are fundamental to all aspects of his thought and present in every genre of his writings at every stage of his

career, 'assuming a leading role in the late works.'<sup>8</sup> The present essay will accordingly aim to be representative rather than comprehensive.

## TRANSLATIONS

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Bonaventure's use of Dionysius has been meticulously catalogued and commented upon by Bougerol,<sup>9</sup> who notes that while he draws upon the translations of Hilduin, Eriugena, Sarracenus, and Grosseteste, together with the *Extractio* of Thomas Gallus, he seems also to have had access to versions differing from them all and in the case of the *Divine Names*, unrelated to any other; that he evidently obtained a new version of the *Celestial Hierarchy* during his doctoral period, and that he seems to have quoted the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in a special version used also by Alexander of Hales. Bougerol concludes that the first Franciscan School possessed and regarded as authoritative a version of the *Dionysiaca* of unknown authorship comprising a hybrid transcription of Eriugena and Sarracenus modified in places to bring it closer to the Latin of the Schools but also attentive to the Greek.<sup>10</sup>

## SERAPHIC LOVE AND ANAGOGICAL ECSTASY IN DIONYSIUS

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For Dionysius the created order, ourselves included, is the ecstatic outpouring of divine eros, and the return to God our reciprocating ecstasy. Hierarchy is the order intrinsic to divine eros as reflected in creation, and unknowing the summit of the spiritual life wherein we 'stand outside ourselves in ecstasy'.<sup>11</sup> All of these themes are integral to Bonaventure's thought, along with the association of the Seraphim with burning love. However, neither this association nor the role of love in the ascent into unknowing is explicit in Dionysius. The explicit association of the Dionysian Seraphim with love originates with Eriugena's commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* and is taken up by Hugh of St Victor,<sup>12</sup> while it is in Thomas Gallus' *Extractio* that the *Mystical Theology* first acquires an explicitly affective dimension.<sup>13</sup> This might suggest that Bonaventure's ecstatic reading of the Areopagite owed more to his previous Latin interpreters than to authentically Dionysian doctrine, and so we shall begin by outlining three reasons why we should suppose love to be implicit in these Dionysian contexts.

In the first place, the direct indexing of love and heat to each other and to proximity to God is fundamental to Origenian and Evagriian thought<sup>14</sup> and may therefore plausibly be imputed to Dionysius. In particular, Dionysius' observation regarding the capacity of the diverse members of a hierarchy to receive and transmit warmth that the rays of the sun pass easily through the front line of matter since it is more translucent than the others, but appears dimmer and more diffuse as they encounter more opaque

matter<sup>15</sup> is strongly redolent of Evagrius' metaphysics of embodiment. Second, the association of eros with the ascent to, and union with, the First Principle is integral to Greek Neoplatonism, both pagan and Christian. In Plato's *Symposium* eros motivates the pursuit of wisdom and Beauty Itself;<sup>16</sup> Dionysius paraphrases *Symposium* 211a at *DN* 4.7 (701D–704A), while Proclus cites the *Symposium* on the anagogical role of eros in his *Commentary on First Alcibiades*.<sup>17</sup> For Plotinus, nous has one power for thinking and one by which it looks at what transcends it by means of a direct reception and awareness, and while in the former mode it is in its right mind, in the latter it is in love (eros), 'drunk with nectar'.<sup>18</sup> For Gregory of Nyssa, the vision of God involves the continual rekindling of desire,<sup>19</sup> while for Evagrius an unspeakable eros carries the wisdom-loving nous up to the intelligible height.<sup>20</sup> It is more likely that Dionysius thinks it unnecessary explicitly to specify the role of eros in mystical ascent and union than that he departs so radically from his tradition as to deny it. Third, in the *Divine Names* Dionysius explicitly affirms the Beautiful and the Good to be the source of all movement, both in the soul and in the cosmos, since all things must desire and yearn for it,<sup>21</sup> from which it surely follows that eros is integral to the mystical ascent and union. We take it therefore that Eriugena read Dionysius perceptively rather than eisegetically and that when Bonaventure cites Dionysius to the effect that the whole of mystical theology 'consists in excessive love according to a threefold hierarchic force: purgative, illuminative, and perfective'<sup>22</sup> he understands him correctly.

## *THE SENTENCE COMMENTARY*

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Bonaventure worked out the main contours of his thought in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, composed during his studies at the University of Paris and completed by 1252. Axiomatic is the idea of God as self-diffusive good, in relation to which the *Sentence Commentary* includes eighteen citations of *DN* 4.1 (693B), 'This essential Good, by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things'; his interpretation of it has been comprehensively studied by Bougerol.<sup>23</sup> Also fundamental is the framework of procession and return, and of hierarchy. He cites three definitions of 'hierarchy' which he attributes to Dionysius, explaining that the first refers to the uncreated hierarchy and the second and third to created hierarchies.<sup>24</sup> According to the first, based on *CH* 3.1 (164D):

Hierarchy is divine beauty, so simple, so good, so perfect and perfecting.

The second definition is Dionysius' own, again from *CH* 3.1 (164D):

Hierarchy is a sacred order, understanding, and activity, resembling the deiform as far as possible and ascending into likeness to God in proportion to the divinely given illuminations.



The angelic hierarchy images the Trinity as *ordo*, *scientia*, and *actio*, corresponding respectively to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The third definition adapts Dionysius' description of the aim of hierarchy at *CH* 3.2 (165A):

Hierarchy is assimilation to, and union with, God as far as possible, this assimilation and union having God himself as the master of sacred science and activity and being unceasingly directed to his most divine beauty; it transforms as far as possible those who praise him.

This, Bonaventure explains, concerns above all the return to God. He concludes by deriving from these definitions a magisterial definition applicable to all hierarchies: 'Hierarchy is an ordered power of sacred and rational realities which preserves their proper authority for those who are subordinate'; a similar definition is advanced by Alexander of Hales.<sup>25</sup>

## THE BREVILOQUIUM

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Bonaventure began teaching in the School of the Minors at the University of Paris in the school year 1253–1254 and by 1257 had composed his *Breviloquium* to present in compact and systematic form the synthesis worked out in the *Sentence Commentary*. Its prologue focuses on biblical exegesis and its body on doctrine. Throughout, he uses the verbs *influer*, *illuminare*, and their cognates to refer to the divine activity mediated by hierarchy; thus Scripture flows (*fluit*) from divine revelation, 'coming down from the Father of lights, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name'<sup>26</sup> while faith is a supernatural illumination.<sup>27</sup> The height of Holy Scripture consists in its describing the hierarchies in their ordered ranks, namely the ecclesiastical, the angelic, and the divine, 'or in other words, the subcelestial, the celestial, and the supercelestial',<sup>28</sup> while its depth resides in its multiplicity of mystical understandings, tropological, allegorical, and anagogical, through which we are 'cleansed by virtuous deeds, illumined by radiant faith, and perfected by burning love'.<sup>29</sup> The body of the *Breviloquium* has seven parts ordered according to the Dionysian framework of procession and return: Part 1 describes the origin of all things in God's self-diffusive love; Part 2, the *exitus* of creation from God through the Word; Part 3, the fall; Part 4, the Incarnation as the turning point when the Incarnation initiates the return of creation to its source; Parts 5 and 6, how the return is accomplished through grace and the sacraments, and Part 7, the final judgement. The circular flow of *exitus-reditus* has its source and paradigm in the Trinity:

All power derives from the first and supreme cause, all wisdom flows (*fluit*) from the first and supreme exemplar, and all willing tends towards the highest end. It is therefore necessary for the one who is first to be almighty, all knowing, and all benevolent. Now, the first and supreme oneness, returning upon itself in a complete and perfect

circle, is in fact omnipotence; first and supreme truth, likewise returning upon itself, is omniscience; and first and supreme goodness returning upon itself is supreme benevolence.<sup>30</sup>

In the created order the return of non-rational creatures is mediated by the human soul, which in virtue of having existence, life, feeling, and intelligence, is a microcosm through which every creature ‘may be led back, as if in an intelligible circle, to its beginning in which it is perfected and beatified’, thereby ‘fulfilling the yearning of every sensible and corporeal nature’;<sup>31</sup> this recalls Dionysius’ description of how all things long for the Trinity, the intelligent and rational by way of knowledge, those below by way of perception, and the remainder ‘by way of the stirrings of being alive and in whatever fashion befits their condition.’<sup>32</sup>

While the literal sense of the creation narrative refers to sensible and corporeal natures, its spiritual sense describes the creation of the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, the former referred to symbolically by the term ‘heaven’ and the latter by the term ‘earth.’<sup>33</sup> For Bonaventure as for Dionysius at *DN* 7.2 (868B) the angelic nature is an intellectual and incorporeal substance with a deiform intellect<sup>34</sup> and the celestial hierarchy is threefold, its highest tier comprising Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim; the intermediate, Dominions, Virtues, and Powers, and the lowest, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. Most of the latter group are charged with ministering to humans by purifying, illuminating, and perfecting us according to the command of God’s will.<sup>35</sup> Bonaventure assigns the following attributes to them:<sup>36</sup>

Sharpness of reason in contemplation	Worship (the divine majesty)	Thrones
	Wisdom (understanding the truth of the divine majesty)	Cherubim
	Love (desiring the goodness of the divine majesty)	Seraphim
Perfect capacity for action	The power to command	Dominions
	The power to execute	Virtues
	The power to implement	Powers
Perfect ministry	Ruling	Principalities
	Revealing	Archangels
	Assisting	Angels

It is, however, in relation to the human soul that Bonaventure explicitly invokes Dionysius’ description of the providential action of hierarchy. Having defined the human nature as a composite of the corporeal and incorporeal natures, he explains that the First Principle imparts its blessedness not only to the spiritual beings close to it but

also to the bodily creatures far removed from it, but in the latter case indirectly 'because the divine law is that the lower beings be led to the highest through intermediaries'.<sup>37</sup>

This law finds its fullest expression in the Incarnation of the Word, since humankind could only have been reconciled to God by means of a mediator 'who could touch God with one hand and humanity with the other'.<sup>38</sup> The Incarnation unites humanity with the angelic hierarchy and the Trinity such that through Christ and the created hierarchies humankind is able to become deiform. To ensure its universal scope all three hierarchies—divine, angelic, and human—were involved in it: the three Persons of the Trinity and a representative of the angelic orders as well as both human sexes:

The angel Gabriel was the herald of the eternal Father, the immaculate Virgin was the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the conceived offspring was the very person of the Word.<sup>39</sup>

By reason of the human nature he assumed, Christ, the middle person of the super-celestial hierarchy of the Trinity, is Hierarch in both the ecclesiastical and angelic hierarchies.<sup>40</sup> As Hierarch he is the one who, supremely ordered in himself, confers order on others, enabling them to attain likeness to God.<sup>41</sup> Describing his activity in terms that recall Dionysius' celebration of the superabundance of the supreme Godhead who, 'granted as a gift to all [in the Incarnation], flows over in shares of goodness to all' and 'transcendently surpasses the being of everything, even ... in the ceaseless flow of his undiminishing bounties',<sup>42</sup> Bonaventure explains that:

in order to have an effective influence a principle must possess in itself a fontal and original fullness: a fullness not merely sufficient but superabundant. Hence, it was necessary for the Incarnate Word to be full of grace and truth, so that all the just might receive of his fullness, as all the members of the body receive the impulse of movement and sense from the head.<sup>43</sup>

Christ's presence in all three hierarchies is what enables the communion between them, meaning that he is the basis of hierarchy and *influentia* his 'farreaching and all embracing presence'.<sup>44</sup> Christ's influencing power reaches all 'who are bound to him in faith and, through an inpouring (*influentam*) of grace become members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit, and thus children of God the Father'.<sup>45</sup> Christ is the fountain-head in whom dwells 'the fontal, radical, and original fullness of all grace' and who as the one head influences his mystical body.<sup>46</sup>

It follows that hierarchy is integral to Bonaventure's theology of grace and the sacraments. Grace is a divinely given gift, bestowed and infused directly by God, together with and in which we receive the Holy Spirit, the good and perfect gift coming down from the Father of lights through the Incarnate Word. It is a gift by which the soul is perfected and becomes the bride of Christ; a gift that purifies, illumines, and perfects the soul:<sup>47</sup>

If then, the rational spirit is to become worthy of eternal happiness, it must partake of this God-conforming influence. The influence that renders the soul deiform comes

from God, conforms us to God, and leads to God as our end. It therefore restores the image of our mind to likeness with the blessed Trinity—not only in terms of its order of origin, but also in terms of its rectitude of choice and of its rest in enjoying [God]. And since a soul possessing these qualities is led back immediately to God and directly conformed to God, this grace is therefore given immediately by God acting as the source of this inflowing. . . . For not only is it given freely by God, it also conforms to God and leads to God as an end, so that the work that came from God might return to God. In this way it achieves, in the manner of an intelligible circle, the fulfillment of all rational spirits.<sup>48</sup>

Grace flows from the sacraments and Christ is the origin and font of healing grace<sup>49</sup> and fountain of every sacramental grace.<sup>50</sup> The Eucharist in particular is ‘the sacrament of communion and love’ and in the age of grace ushered in by the Incarnation it is fitting that this sacrament ‘should not only signify these realities but inflame its recipients toward them so that it accomplishes what it signifies,’<sup>51</sup> citing Peter Lombard, *Liber 4 Sent.*<sup>52</sup> The verb *inflammare* signals the involvement of the Seraphim in mediating the love embodied in the Eucharist and the ecstatic nature of that sacrament:

Now what most inflames us toward mutual love and most fully unites the members is the oneness of the Head. It is from him that a stream of mutual love flows into us by means of the all-pervading, unifying, and transforming power that his love possesses. Therefore this sacrament contains Christ’s true body and immaculate flesh in such a way that it penetrates our very being, unites us to one another, and transforms us into him. It does so by virtue of that burning love through which Christ gave himself to us, offered himself up for us, and now gives himself back to us, so that he might remain with us until the end of the world.<sup>53</sup>

As the medium through which Christ’s burning love flows from its fontal source through the whole created order, hierarchy is ecstatic union, and as Christ’s flesh the Eucharist is the paradigmatically hierarchical sacrament, the sacrament of ecstatic union. To consume it is to be hierarchized, which means to be brought, through Christ’s burning love mediated by the Seraphim, into ecstatic union with him and conformity with all the hierarchies.

## ON THE THREEFOLD WAY

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Subtitled *On Enkindling Love (Incendium amoris)*, *De triplici via* comprises Bonaventure’s ‘most extensive reflections on the human response’ to Christ as Hierarchy.<sup>54</sup> The three ways, which correspond to the moral, allegorical, and anagogical meanings of Scripture,<sup>55</sup> are the purgative, illuminative, and perfective by which the soul is hierarchized such that the image of God is reformed into his similitude. The purgative way consists in ridding oneself of sin and leads to peace; the illuminative way in imitation of Christ and leads to truth, and the perfective way in being joined with the Spouse and leads to charity.<sup>56</sup> Early in the first chapter Bonaventure alludes to the first

paragraph of the *Mystical Theology* in appealing to ‘the counsel of blessed Dionysius to Timothy, where he exhorts him saying “Turn to the ray”, and so forth’,<sup>57</sup> while the work’s final paragraphs echo chapter 3 of the *Mystical Theology* in describing the twofold contemplation of divine things, the way of affirmation and the way of negation, the former attributed to Augustine and the latter to Dionysius,<sup>58</sup> who is cited to the effect that while affirmations can be disjoined, negations are true, such that while the latter appear to say less, they actually say more.<sup>59</sup> The concluding paragraph summarizes the whole:

Note that in the first hierarchy, truth must be pleaded for in groaning and prayer, and this is the task of the Angels; it must be listened to studiously and willingly, and this is the task of the Archangels; it must be proclaimed by example and preaching, and this is the task of the Principalities. In the second hierarchy, truth must be sought as a refuge and a commission, and this is the task of the Powers; it must be grasped by zeal and emulation, which pertains to the Virtues; it must be assimilated by self-contempt and mortification, which belongs to the Dominions. In the third hierarchy, truth is to be adored by sacrifice and praise, which is the task of the thrones; it must be admired by ecstasy and contemplation, the domain of the Cherubim; it must be embraced with kisses and love, which pertains to the Seraphim.<sup>60</sup>

## *THE JOURNEY OF THE MIND INTO GOD*

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In the year 1226 at Mount La Verna, St Francis experienced a vision of a Seraph in the form of the Crucified One during which he received the stigmata.<sup>61</sup> Thirty-three years later Bonaventure composed his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, a work which brings Dionysius into close dialogue with Augustine<sup>62</sup> and in Davis’ view amounts to an interpretation of the *Mystical Theology* in the light of Francis’ vision, itself understood as an enactment of Christ’s passion.<sup>63</sup> The Prologue commences with a prayer to ‘that First Beginning from whom all other illumination flows as from the God of lights and from whom comes every good and perfect gift’, for enlightenment and guidance. Then Bonaventure describes how, having withdrawn to Mount La Verna and recalled the miracle Francis experienced there, he ‘saw immediately that the Seraphic vision pointed not only to the uplifting of our father himself in contemplation but also to the road by which one might arrive at this experience’:

For those six wings can well be understood as symbols of six levels of uplifting illuminations through which the soul is prepared ... to pass over to peace through the ecstatic rapture of Christian wisdom.<sup>64</sup>

The only way, he continues, to undergo such a passover is ‘through the most burning love of the Crucified’, and no-one is disposed for such contemplations leading to ecstasies of the mind unless, like Daniel, they are a ‘man of desires.’<sup>65</sup> Prayer being ‘the mother and the origin of the upward movement of the mind’ and ‘to instruct us on the matter of

spiritual ecstasy, Dionysius offers a prayer' and Bonaventure does likewise; not, however, that of Dionysius, but Ps. 85:11.<sup>66</sup>

The body of the *Itinerarium* comprises seven chapters, six of which correspond to the wings of the Seraph and days of creation and describe successive illuminations through which the mind ascends by contemplating God: through the vestiges in the universe; in the vestiges in the world of sense realities; through the image of God imprinted on our natural powers; in the image reformed by grace, known by the superior light of revelation; through God's primary name, which is Being, and in the name of the most blessed Trinity, which is the Good. The seventh chapter is entitled 'The mystical ecstasy of the mind in which rest is given to the intellect and through ecstasy our affection passes over totally into God'. Returning to Francis' vision when he 'was carried out of himself in contemplation and passed over into God', Bonaventure writes:

If this passing over is to be perfect, all intellectual activities must be given up, and our deepest and total affection must be directed to God and transformed into God. But this is mystical and very secret, which 'no one knows except one who receives it'.<sup>67</sup> And no one receives it except one who desires it. And no one desires it but one who is inflamed to the marrow with the fire of the Holy Spirit whom Christ has sent into the world.<sup>68</sup>

The reference to giving up all intellectual activities alludes to *MT* 1.1 (997B). Bonaventure then cites Dionysius' opening prayer in full and continues to paraphrase *MT* 1.1 (997B–1000A):

[The opening prayer] was said to God. But to the friend to whom this was written we can say with Dionysius: 'In this matter of mystical visions, my friend, being strengthened for your journey, leave behind the world of the senses and of intellectual operations, all visible and invisible things, and everything that exists or does not exist, and being unaware even of yourself, allow yourself to be drawn back into unity with that One who is above all essence and knowledge in as far as that is possible. Thus, leaving all things and freed from all things, in a total and absolute ecstasy of a pure mind, transcending your self and all things, you shall rise up to the superessential radiance of the divine darkness.'<sup>69</sup>

With the mind's abandonment of its intellectual operations illumination gives way to darkness as it is 'immolated with the ardent love witnessed in and made possible by the life and death of Francis'.<sup>70</sup> Purgation, illumination, and perfection are revealed to be the ecstasies of the soul in love with Christ as the 'fire that inflames totally and carries one into God through excessive fervour and the most burning affections'<sup>71</sup> ends on the cross. But it is not only the summit of the ascent which involves an ecstatic surpassing of the self. Since hierarchy is the medium by which the mind is uplifted by divine *influentia*, self-surpassing characterizes every level. The *Itinerarium* is not a series of steps by which the mind prepares itself to be carried into ecstasy; rather, 'the entire journey into God is an ecstasis, or, better, a series of them ... Bonaventure is emphatic from the beginning that the entire Seraphic order is set on fire and affixed to the cross'.<sup>72</sup>

## ON THE REDUCTION OF THE ARTS TO THEOLOGY

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*De reductione artium ad theologiam*, a work whose date is uncertain but according to Hayes probably late,<sup>73</sup> situates the diverse fields of human knowledge in a hierarchy such that 'all the familiar and new forms of knowledge in the arts and sciences [are brought] into an all-embracing theological framework and [integrated] into the journey of the human spirit into God'.<sup>74</sup> An opusculum occupying only seven pages of the Quaracchi critical edition, it commences like the *Itinerarium* with Jas. 1:17, after which Bonaventure declares:

This text speaks of the source of all illumination; but at the same time, it suggests that there are many lights which flow generously from that fountal source of light.<sup>75</sup>

He proceeds to distinguish four lights: the exterior light of mechanical knowledge, the inferior light of sense perception, the interior light of philosophical knowledge, and the superior light of grace and of Sacred Scripture. The first illumines with respect to the form of artefacts, the second with respect to natural forms, the third with respect to intellectual truth, and the fourth with respect to saving truth (*ibid.*). He then divides philosophical knowledge into three branches to derive 'six differentiations or illuminations' of this fourfold light which can 'be traced back to the six days of formation or illumination in which the world was made' so that each corresponds to a particular day: knowledge of Sacred Scripture to the first, sense perception to the second, the mechanical arts to the third, rational philosophy to the fourth, natural philosophy to the fifth, and moral philosophy to the sixth. Each art and its relationship to God is then described in order to show how his 'manifold wisdom',<sup>76</sup> 'clearly revealed in sacred Scripture, lies hidden in all knowledge and all nature' and how 'all divisions of knowledge are servants of theology'.<sup>77</sup> In this context, the self-surpassing ascent and hierarchization of the mind - in the context of the *Itinerarium*, these are one and the same movement - is effected through its being 'led back', *reducere*, from the various arts, through the moral philosophy that should govern their practice, to the Good which is the source and rightful aim of all.

## COLLATIONS ON THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

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Bonaventure's Dionysian synthesis receives its most comprehensive expression in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*. Delivered in the year before his death and due to his elevation to the cardinalate never completed, like the *Itinerarium* they associate the days of creation with successive illuminations leading the soul to the highest wisdom. In terms that recall Dionysius' description of how the divine eros 'travels in an endless circle through the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and to the Good ... ever on the



same centre ... always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself',<sup>78</sup> Bonaventure sets the stage by reaffirming the spiritual and metaphysical centrality of Christ:

Lord, I came forth from thee and through thee I return to thee. Such is the metaphysical centre that leads us back and this is the sum total of our metaphysics: emanation, exemplarity, and consummation, that is to say, illumination through spiritual radiations and return to the Supreme Being.<sup>79</sup>

Corresponding to the fourth day, when God created the sun, the moon, and the stars<sup>80</sup> is the intelligence uplifted by contemplation. Noting as in the *Itinerarium* that the contemplative must be a 'man of desires',<sup>81</sup> Bonaventure explains that the objects of contemplation are God and the angels (the 'celestial monarchy'), the Church militant, and the hierarchized human soul.<sup>82</sup> Consideration of the celestial monarchy is assimilated to sunlight for the brilliance of its purity, clarity, and life-giving inflaming.<sup>83</sup> Just as the sun's rays illuminate the night through the moon, so the divine ray illuminates contemplative souls through the Church, and consideration of the Church militant is compared to the moon for its obscure or symbolic reflected brilliance, its excessive or ecstatic reflected brilliance, and its ordered reflected brilliance.<sup>84</sup> Consideration of the hierarchized human soul is realized through the light of the stars, which has an enduring, beautiful, and delightful radiance.<sup>85</sup>

*Collationes* 21–22 expound the hierarchical contemplations in terms of triads reflecting the exemplarity of the Trinity in the celestial hierarchy, the hierarchy of the Church militant, and the hierarchized human soul. Bonaventure reiterates from his *Sentence Commentary* but in slightly different wording the Dionysian definition of hierarchy as 'a divine order, knowledge, and activity, assimilated to the deiform as much as possible, and uplifting to the likeness of God in proportion 'to the divinely given illuminations', and again associates power, knowledge, and activity, with the Father, Son, and Spirit respectively. But this time he specifies 'sacred knowledge' and adds 'for power without knowledge is blunted, while knowledge without action is fruitless'.<sup>86</sup> He correlates the Trinity with the nine choirs of angels by deriving from it three triads each of which corresponds to a Person as he is in himself and as he is in the other two Persons. The triads are ordered to those of the celestial hierarchy by considering the Trinity as originating, governing, and beatifying, it being more noble to beatify than to create, and to create than to govern. Regarded as beatifying, God has the further appropriations of eternity, beauty, and delight; as creating, of power, wisdom, and will, and as governing, of piety, truth, and sanctity.<sup>87</sup> Further appropriations and distinctions follow, but these suffice for illustrative purposes and can be represented as follows:

God as Beatifier			
Supremely inflames	eternity	Father in himself	Thrones
	beauty	Father in the Son	Cherubim
	delight	Father in the Holy Spirit	Seraphim

God as Creator			
Supremely invigorates	power	Son in the Father	Dominions
	wisdom	Son in himself	Virtues
	will	Son in the Holy Spirit	Powers
God as Governor			
Supremely leads back	piety	Holy Spirit in himself	Angels
	truth	Holy Spirit in the Son	Archangels
	sanctity	Holy Spirit in the Father	Principalities

In the case of the Church militant further threefold divisions produce twenty-seven orders, correlated with the angelic choirs as follows:<sup>88</sup>

Procession ( <i>processus</i> )		
Fundamental	Patriarchs	Thrones
	Prophets	Cherubim
	Apostles	Seraphim
Advancing	Martyrs	Dominions
	Confessors	Virtues
	Virgins	Powers
Consummating	Presidents (including prelates, whatever their authority)	Angels
	Masters (teachers of philosophy, law, theology, any good art that promotes the Church)	Archangels
	Regulars (the monastic life)	Principalities
Ascent ( <i>ascensus</i> )		
Purgative	Doorkeepers	Angels
	Readers	Archangels
	Exorcists	Principalities
Illuminative	Acolytes	Powers
	Subdeacons	Virtues
	Deacons	Dominions

Perfective	Priests	Thrones
	Bishops	Cherubim
	Pope and Patriarchs	Seraphim
Practice ( <i>exertium</i> )		
Laity	People	Angels
	Consuls	Archangels
	Princes	Principalities
Clerics	Sacred ministers	Powers
	Priests	Virtues
	Pontiffs	Dominions
Monks	Devoted to prayer (Cistercians, Praemonstratensians, Carthusians, Grandimontensians, Canons regular)	Thrones
	Speculatives (Preachers and Friars Minor)	Cherubim
	Ecstatics	Seraphim

This highly simplified summary affords a glimpse of the scope of Bonaventure's mature vision of hierarchy, the cosmic order patterned on the Trinity and centred on Christ. From its fontal source in the self-diffusive goodness of the uncreated hierarchy, the ecstatic, burning love of Christ flows, as his *influentia*, via the celestial hierarchy, the Church militant, and the human soul through the entire created order, uplifting it and conforming it to its source. The whole universe of created hierarchies are analogies in the Dionysian sense that each member receives and transmits that love, that *influentia*, in proportion to its capacity. *Influentia*, as Hayes explains, 'streams forth through the channels of this vast, living, organism, reaching into all areas of the spiritual life and bringing forth the higher degrees of God-likeness in creatures.'<sup>89</sup> Corresponding to the Seraphim in the practical triad of the Church are those who, like Francis, are uplifted ecstatically or excessively to God. and it is in such people that the Church will find her final perfection.<sup>90</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In sum, Bonaventure found in the Areopagite an authority endorsed by Paul himself whose teachings were ideally suited to his own interests, and so he drank deeply from

the Dionysian well. Bougerol concludes that in addition to studying and assimilating Dionysius throughout his time at the University of Paris, he continued to read and deepen his knowledge of him while head of the Franciscan Order, thus his *Apologia pauperum*, composed in 1269, is replete with Dionysian themes.<sup>91</sup> The *Legenda maior*, composed between 1260 and 1263, portrays St Francis in overtly Dionysian terms and Armstrong argues that it is structured on the threefold pattern of purgation, illumination, and perfection.<sup>92</sup> The only discernible development Bougerol finds in the Seraphic Doctor's use of the Areopagite is that in the first part of his life he assimilates him more as a theologian, and in the second part, more as a mystic concerned with union with God.<sup>93</sup> It is in the latter regard that, as Davis notes, he 'makes explicit the Dionysian references of Francis' Seraphic vision [and thereby] gives flesh to Dionysius' mystical itinerary through love (*eros, amor*) to a union beyond knowledge in the exemplary life of the saint'.<sup>94</sup> To which can be added that just as, by Dionysian association, the 'hierarchical man' Francis<sup>95</sup> is assimilated to Paul and Moses in their ecstasies, so they share in his ecstatic passing over into Christ Crucified.

## NOTES

1. Bougerol (1989, *avant-propos*).
2. *II Sent., praelocutio* (II, 1).
3. *Hexaem.* 2.28 (V, 341).
4. *De reductione* 5 (V, 321).
5. *Legenda maior* 13.3 (XIII, 543).
6. *DN* 4.13, 712A.
7. Bougerol (1996: 311, 307).
8. Hayes (1981: 150).
9. Bougerol (1989, 1996).
10. Bougerol (1964: 47–48).
11. Turner (1995b: 48).
12. Rorem (2009: 78–79).
13. Coolman (2009: 91).
14. See in particular Origen, *De Principiis* 2.8.3.
15. *CH* 13.3 (301AB).
16. *Symposium* 204b–212a.
17. *Commentary on First Alcibiades* 29.1; 30.14–15; 129.22–24.
18. *Ennead* VI.7.35.20–25.
19. *Life of Moses*, 2.239.
20. *Chapters on Prayer* 52.
21. *DN* 4.10 (705B–708B).
22. *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* 13.46 (VII, 349).
23. Bougerol (1989: 81).
24. *II Sent.*, d.9, *praenotata* (V, 237–38).
25. *Glossa in II Sent.*, d.9, n.1 (II 38).
26. Jas. 1:17; Eph. 3:15; cited by Dionysius at *CH* 1.1 (120B), *DN* 1.4 (592A) respectively.

27. *Brev. Prologue* 0.2 (V, 201).
28. *Brev. Prologue* 3.1 (V, 204); Eph. 3:18).
29. *Brev. Prologue* 4.5 (V, 206).
30. *Brev.* 1.6.5 (V, 215).
31. *Brev.* 2.4.3 (V, 221).
32. *DN* 1.5 (593D).
33. *Brev.* 2.5.9 (V, 223).
34. *Brev.* 2.6.1, 4 (V, 224); II *Sent.* 1.2.3.2; 7.1.1–2 (II 50, 177)).
35. *Brev.* 2.8.1 (V, 225).
36. *Brev.* 2.8.3 (V, 226).
37. *Brev.* 2.9.2 (V, 226); CH 4.3 (181A).
38. *Brev.* 4.1.4 (V, 241).
39. *Brev.* 4.3.4 (V, 243).
40. *Brev. Prologue* 3.2 (V, 205).
41. Delio (2001: 97).
42. *DN* 2. 11 (649BC).
43. *Brev.* 4.5.5 (V, 246); John 1:14, 16; Col. 1:18–19; Eph. 1:22–23.
44. Hellmann (2001: 126).
45. *Brev.* 4.5.6 (V, 246); 1 Cor. 6:15, 19; Gal. 3:26.
46. *Brev.* 4.5.6 (V, 246); Col. 1:18–19
47. *Brev.* 5.1.2 (V, 252).
48. *Brev.* 5.1.3, 6 (V, 252).
49. *Brev.* 6.2.4 (V, 267).
50. *Brev.* 6.4.4 (V, 268).
51. *Brev.* 6.9.3 (V, 274).
52. *Liber 4 Sent.*, 4.1 (2: 251–252).
53. *Brev.* 6.9.3 (V, 274).
54. Hayes (1981: 45).
55. *De triplici via* 1 (VIII, 3).
56. *De triplici via* 1 (VIII, 3).
57. *De triplici via* 2 (VIII, 3–4); MT 1.1 (1000A)).
58. *De triplici via* 11 (VIII, 16)).
59. *De triplici via* 13 (VIII, 17).
60. *De triplici via* 14 (VIII, 18).
61. *Legenda maior* 13.1–4 (XIII, 542–543).
62. Turner (1995), Hankey (1997).
63. Davis (2016: 105).
64. *Itinerarium* Prologue 2–3 (V, 295).
65. *Itinerarium* Prologue 3 (V, 296); Dan. 9:23.
66. *Itinerarium* 1.1 (V, 297).
67. Rev. 2:17.
68. *Itinerarium* 7.4 (V, 312).
69. *Itinerarium* 7.5 (V, 313).
70. Davis (2016: 89).
71. *Itinerarium* 7.6 (V, 313).
72. Davis (2016: 92).
73. Hayes (1996: 3).

74. Hayes (1996: 11).
75. *De reductione* 1 (V, 319).
76. Eph. 3:10.
77. *De reductione* 26 (V, 325).
78. DN 4.14, 712D.
79. *Hexaem.* 1.17 (V, 332).
80. Gen. 1:14–19.
81. Daniel 1:17.
82. *Hexaem.* 20.1–3 (V, 425).
83. *Hexaem.* 20.4 (V, 423).
84. *Hexaem.* 20.13, (V, 427).
85. *Hexaem.* 20.22 (V, 429).
86. *Hexaem.* 21.17 (V, 434).
87. *Hexaem.* 20.20, 22–23, (V, 434–435).
88. *Hexaem.* 22.2–23 (V, 438–41).
89. Hayes (1981: 17); *Hexaem.* 21, 2 (V, 431).
90. *Hexaem.* 22.22 (V, 440–441).
91. Bougerol (1989: 121).
92. Armstrong (1978: 52–54).
93. Bougerol (1989: 121).
94. Davis (2016: 38)
95. *Legenda maior* Prol. 1 (XIII, 504).

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## CHAPTER 24

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# HUGH OF ST VICTOR AND DIONYSIUS

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PAUL ROREM

THE Dionysian legacy in Hugh of St Victor can be summed up by a paradox, as presented by Dominique Poirel on the first page of his major book on the topic: when it comes to St Denys, Athenian authority and Parisian martyr, there seem to be two different authors named Hugh of St Victor.<sup>1</sup> One of them wrote a major commentary on the Dionysian *Celestial Hierarchy*, the work Poirel rightly considers to be the decisive awakening of a high medieval Latin interest in and appropriation of the Areopagite.<sup>2</sup> The 'other Hugh', however, wrote a great many significant works with never an appeal to the authority of Dionysius and no trace of the distinctive vocabulary or characteristic doctrines of that corpus.<sup>3</sup> Hugh's *De Sacramentis*, for a prominent example, shows his Augustinian heritage and explicitly cites the Bishop of Hippo, along with very few other authorities, but never Dionysius.<sup>4</sup> The first task of the current study is to document this apparent paradox by examining Hugh's commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* and then looking at his overall corpus with the Dionysian question in mind. Along the way, Poirel's resolution of the apparent contradiction will also be considered, namely, that Hugh's assimilation of the Dionysian corpus was so profound and thorough as to become imperceptible or scarcely visible, all because 'his goal was to assimilate the substance, not to repeat the letter' of the Areopagite's thought.<sup>5</sup> The alternative argument here, that Hugh did not in fact assimilate or integrate the substance or indeed any significant aspect of the Dionysian writings into his own corpus, comes perilously close to attempting to prove a negative.<sup>6</sup>

## HUGH'S COMMENTARY ON THE *CELESTIAL* *HIERARCHY*

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Hugh's Dionysian commentary itself is distinctive in his corpus for its length and genre, as one of his longest works and his only commentary outside of Scripture. The *Super*

*Ierarchiam* represented an enormous investment of time, and right through the heart of Hugh's career. The time involved was not just individual but also communal, for this was a lecture series at the Abbey of St Victor. This process occupied Hugh for well over a decade, from the middle of his career right up until near his death.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Hugh's own thought was well advanced at the time, and his distinctive themes can be sought in this work; further, the extensive engagement with the Dionysian text could well have left an imprint on Hugh's other works, some of them concurrent, such as *De sacramentis*. We take up first the question of how Hugh interpreted Dionysius, and then how or indeed whether Dionysius influenced Hugh. Left for other studies is the major influence of Hugh's commentary on the subsequent Dionysian legacy.

As Roger Baron and René Roques showed long ago, Hugh's commentary on Dionysius is largely a thorough presentation of the Areopagite's text, paraphrasing it sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase. How accurately does Hugh expound the Dionysian material, and when does he seem to interject some non-Dionysian categories into his exposition? Although Hugh's Prologue is a special case, not commenting on specific Dionysian texts, it will lead us into the issues. The Prologue emphasizes a three-fold hierarchy: the celestial and the ecclesiastical, of course, as evident in the very titles of the two tandem Dionysian treatises. But where the Areopagite's penchant for triads led him to the third hierarchy being the 'legal' one (meaning in the age of the law), Hugh's triad is different. Filling out his references to the other Dionysian treatises, Hugh here claims a 'divine' hierarchy, namely the Holy Trinity, and connects it to the *Divine Names*.<sup>8</sup> There is no warrant for this as a 'third hierarchy' in Dionysius, either in the discussions of hierarchy or in the *Divine Names* itself. The Hugonian triad of hierarchies is decidedly non-Dionysian at this point. Similarly imported, and also departing (albeit less explicitly) from the emphases in the Dionysian corpus, are several related items in the Prologue: multiple Pauline references to Christ crucified (925A) and the foolishness and humility of the cross (928B, 929D, 931A), the discussion of 'mundane' and 'divine' theology (927A, leading to creation and salvation), the Hugonian breakout of learning as logical, ethical, and theoretical (the last broken out as mathematics, physics, and theology, 927B), and, most strikingly, the Augustinian pairing of 'nature and grace' (926C, twice). Overall, the Prologue shows a distinctively Augustinian imprint regarding incarnational humility and the duo of nature and grace, features which are not at all Dionysian.

In the Prologue, Hugh indicates that he will present these profound texts by way of a 'moderate, common, and simple explanation unto understanding.'<sup>9</sup> Turning to the commentary itself, we see immediately and throughout that Hugh's purpose and great achievement is indeed to walk the student hearer or reader through the Dionysian text with extensive paraphrases and simple comments. Whether in the original Greek or in Latin (or English) translation, the Dionysian text is compact and complex, requiring patient restatements and expansions. At the start of his comments on the second chapter, Hugh again makes his purpose plain: 'not to attempt a full scrutiny of the depths of these subjects but only to uncover the surface of the words and expose them

to the light.<sup>10</sup> As noted, Hugh seeks first and most of all to be a faithful presenter of the text at hand, sentence by sentence and often phrase by phrase, to help the Parisian students learn this presumably Parisian Father. Indeed, such was Hugh's pedagogical advice in the *Didascalicon*, namely, to work patiently with the letter of the text and then its sense.<sup>11</sup> Before going further, we must first give Hugh pedagogical credit for these extensive labours in presenting the Areopagite's basic text at length, with such effective paraphrases and exposition.

More to our purpose, amid Hugh's careful paraphrasing there is a notable absence of some of the most characteristic emphases of his corpus as a whole. The reader searches in vain for creation and restoration (*conditio* and *restauratio*) outside the Prologue. There is very little salvation history in general, or eschatology in particular. Neither the given scriptural passages nor any Dionysian texts are interpreted with Hugh's three-fold sense; hence, no mention of allegory or tropology. There is nothing about any form of ark, or even much emphasis on pride and humility outside of the Prologue. In general, one could say there is very little distinctly Hugonian about this commentary, which perhaps reflects Hugh's admirable determination to let Dionysius speak for himself. He even apologizes at the end if he has put any of his own 'mud on [the Dionysian] marble'.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of some distinctive Hugonian material may seem natural to the genre of faithful commentary, but in fact Hugh's comments *do* add some notable emphases from his own Western and Augustinian perspective. As in the mentioned cases in the Prologue, so the commentary itself occasionally emphasizes the incarnation and humility of Christ beyond the Dionysian text.<sup>13</sup> The commentary exhibits a strong Victorine emphasis on how faith leads to service for others, 'teaching in word and deed', as Caroline Bynum isolated it.<sup>14</sup> Hugh returns to this theme often, for the angelic example should inspire ministerial service to others, in speech and in life: 'If therefore you cannot (praise) by speaking, praise by living. That which the tongue does not explicate, a good life commends'.<sup>15</sup> This is a frequent theme of the commentary, but this emphasis comes more from Hugonian interpolations than from the Dionysian text. We have elsewhere considered an extensive excursus where Hugh argues for (seraphic) love over and above (cherubic) knowledge even though Dionysius never made that argument, as summarized below.<sup>16</sup> The whole commentary is infused with that understanding of the fire 'of love'<sup>17</sup> even though the Areopagite's text never connected fire with love.

Most strikingly Augustinian is Hugh's use of 'nature and grace' to interpret an author who did not use that formulation. In the very first chapter, Hugh understands the Johannine light (John 1) as 'the illumination of grace, not a gift of nature'.<sup>18</sup> Nature and grace are closely paired, indeed explicitly contrasted (*non natura confert, sed gratia*<sup>19</sup>), another half dozen times, giving an Augustinian imprint where the Dionysian text had none.<sup>20</sup> Other Augustinian touches superimposed on the Dionysian treatise include: 'nothing between us and God',<sup>21</sup> willing rightly as a gift from God whereas not doing so as our own fault,<sup>22</sup> the upward movement as love for God with the downward movement as love for neighbour,<sup>23</sup> and even a touch of predestination.<sup>24</sup> In general, Hugh was a faithful presenter of the Dionysian text, but he does so as an Augustinian.

## HUGH'S OTHER WORKS

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The question now becomes how or whether Hugh elsewhere integrated the Areopagite's themes; more specifically, how or whether the rest of his corpus shows any imprint of the Dionysian treatises. When asking about the possible influence or imprint of the Dionysian corpus on Hugh's other works, it makes sense to start where Hugh started, namely, with the *Celestial Hierarchy* itself. As often noted, the Greek manuscripts and thus the Latin translations generally start with that treatise, then the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the *Divine Names*, the *Mystical Theology*, and finally the (ten) *Letters*. In each case there are multiple topics, and many of these topics also interested Hugh in his various writings. Did those other Hugonian works, beyond the commentary, display specific points of reception history of the Areopagite's treatises?

### 1. *The Celestial Hierarchy*

The title and first chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy* present a striking case. The very word 'hierarchy' was distinctively Dionysian, being his neologism. Although Hugh's comments initially ventured a real translation, as 'sacred principate',<sup>25</sup> the standard pattern had long been a matter of transliterating the Greek into Latin, as we do into English. The *Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter one, quickly introduced the 'hierarchies of heaven' and 'our hierarchy' as modelled on them, yet using material images. The terminology of hierarchy (including hierarch and hierarchical) recurs throughout the Dionysian corpus as one of its most characteristic linguistic features. Naturally, Hugh uses this word family within his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*. When the Dionysian treatise gets around to defining 'hierarchy' (as order, understanding, and activity), Hugh's commentary shows a solid grasp of the contents and characteristically turns the talk of 'activity' to ministry for others.<sup>26</sup> Some have wondered whether the Prologue's interest in hierarchy pertains to the work's dedication to King Louis VII,<sup>27</sup> but the overall point here is that the distinctive Dionysian word family of 'hierarchy' is never used in the rest of Hugh's corpus, not even once.<sup>28</sup> In *De sacramentis*, for example, his treatment of the angels never uses the term 'hierarchy' for them, although a translator has added the word to the chapter title.<sup>29</sup> Nor is the word 'hierarchy' or 'hierarch' ever used for the Church or clerics in the treatments of those topics in *De sacramentis*. Hugh takes a moment to explain another Greek word, namely, 'laos,' but never uses the word 'hierarchy'.<sup>30</sup> The *Ark* treatises, especially all the coverage of steps or grades up and down Noah's ark, might have been an occasion to use the language of hierarchy, but here too there is none. In fact, a recent and thorough study of *The Mystic Ark* (or *The Making of the Ark*) concludes that there is no Dionysian imprint there at all.<sup>31</sup>

A second characteristically Dionysian theme is also prominent in the very first paragraph of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, namely, procession and return. This well-known

adaptation of Platonism presented Christian revelation as a procession downwards and its interpretation as a return upwards, all in the context of creation as a procession from God and salvation as a return to God. Eriugena's commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* and his own *Periphyseon* make much of this motif and one might also expect to find it pertinent to Hugh's famous pairing of creation and restoration (*conditio* and *restauratio*). Yet Hugh, strikingly, never mentions or uses the Dionysian formulation of procession and return in his other works, neither in the early and brief mention of *conditio* and *reparatio/restauratio* in the *Chronicles* nor in the full-scale structural use of the 'works of creation and restoration' in *De sacramentis*.

Continuing with the *Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter one, there is the major and well-known case of Hugh's *De sacramentis* reusing a major section of his own commentary on Dionysius. The Areopagite had noted, as Hugh's text accurately presents, that our material world contains images, such as odours and lights, of the higher immaterial realm, including reception of the Eucharist as an image of participation in Jesus.<sup>32</sup> At this point Hugh goes to some trouble to argue against those who think that they might here have support for their error that the sacrament is *only* an image or figure. (Although he does not name names, readers medieval and modern could recall prior controversialists such as Berengar, Ratramnus, and Radbertus.) On the contrary, argues Hugh, the sacrament is both a similitude and truth, both an image and a 'res' or reality.<sup>33</sup> Hugh's excursus here, as transferred whole to *De sacramentis*,<sup>34</sup> illustrates his method of frequently reusing his own material,<sup>35</sup> and also shows a prescholastic interest in substance and appearance.<sup>36</sup> The point here, however, is that while this entire passage does document an influence of Hugh's commentary on his other works, this is *not* evidence of an influence of the Dionysian text itself. Hugh is here at pains to qualify the Dionysian language of sacramental symbolism, and that qualification or even refutation is what reappears in *De sacramentis*.

Turning to chapter two of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Hugh engaged a justly famous Dionysian discourse on 'dissimilar similarities', namely, the role of incongruous biblical depictions for the angels and for God such as those drawn from the animal world. In the Areopagite's own thought, this discussion leads to the anagogical, that is, the uplifting role of such incongruities, and to the apophatic, that is, the negations applied to these and other depictions or statements about the angels or about God. These two topics, the anagogical and the apophatic, are prominent enough in the Dionysian corpus as a whole that we should ask how or whether they in particular left an imprint on Hugh's thought, but not both at once. (Although the apophatic cannot be neatly removed from the anagogical, since it is by negations that uplifting occurs, we here concentrate on the 'dissimilar similarities' with respect to the 'anagogical' sense of Scripture, and defer the fuller account of 'negative theology' until the *Mystical Theology* considered below.)

In general, Hugh showed a solid grasp of the Dionysian treatment of biblical similarities (such as light and life) and dissimilarities (such as animals, even worms), and explicates it at some length.<sup>37</sup> He is less comfortable or adept at navigating the Dionysian language of all this as anagogical or uplifting. At the early occurrences of this word family, Hugh rightly defines 'anagogy' as 'ascent or elevation of the mind to

the contemplation of the things on high,<sup>38</sup> but then adds variables not in the Dionysian tradition. In one place, he seems to contrast the anagogical with the symbolic, as a matter of bare revelation or open narration,<sup>39</sup> and in another he links it to love of God,<sup>40</sup> a topic of its own pursued later. The Dionysian anagogical shows up in specific points of biblical interpretation regarding the angels, such as the last chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, where Hugh again does not reflect a good grasp of the terminology.<sup>41</sup> Nor does Hugh use the Dionysian anagogical language elsewhere in his corpus, outside of one mention. In general, his naming of the senses of Scripture is consistently a triad: the historical, the allegorical, and the tropological. (Indeed, a presentation of his corpus can be organized along these lines, for the allegorical is the doctrinal, and the tropological is the spiritual.<sup>42</sup>) Only at one point, early and tentative, does Hugh ever name an 'anagogical' sense of Scripture and then it is not as a fourth sense, which was common elsewhere, but rather as a subset of the allegorical.<sup>43</sup> Otherwise, from the early *Chronicles* and *Didascalicon* through the *De sacramentis* and to the end of his life, Hugh's hermeneutical theory and exegetical practice show no specific legacy of the Dionysian language of the 'anagogical'. This does not take away from Hugh's eloquent, extensive, and accurate exposition of the Areopagite's key role for dissimilarities as more uplifting than similarities. Indeed, Hugh there catches the apophatic import of dissimilarities ('Listen to this great sacrament: what God is is beyond everything; and when it is sought what God is, this cannot be spoken because it cannot be thought'<sup>44</sup>), but the fuller discussion of such negative theology is taken up below.

After these introductory and methodological chapters, the *Celestial Hierarchy* concerns the angels themselves, their definition, names, and even their number. Hugh's commentary dutifully covers all of this, sentence by sentence, including the distinctively Dionysian pattern of grouping the nine biblical types of angels into a triple triad.<sup>45</sup> But when Hugh presents the orders of angels in *De sacramentis*, there is barely a trace of the Areopagite's triadic arrangement. Hugh instead invokes Gregory the Great's numerical logic that there are nine (biblical) types of angels so that humankind will round out the symbolic number of ten. True, *De sacramentis* once groups the nine ranks into three triads, but as an afterthought, not in the main presentation of angelic orders.<sup>46</sup> There is nothing distinctively Dionysian about the Victorine's treatment of the angels' creation, nature, knowledge, free will, orders, or names. Nor, as Conrad Rudolph has now documented, does Hugh's depiction of the angels in *The Mystic Ark* show a Dionysian imprint.<sup>47</sup> At one point, *De sacramentis* explains the name of the seraphim as burning with the 'fire of love,'<sup>48</sup> a fateful phrase that has a large excursus in Hugh's commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*. The idea that love is higher than knowledge seems here to have a celestial warrant, since the seraphim (with the fire of love) are higher than the cherubim (as the font of knowledge), but this stems from Hugh's excursus within his commentary, not from the Dionysian text itself, as I have covered elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> Like the passage on sacramental realism, but more influential on later 'mystics' such as Thomas Gallus and the author of *Cloud of Unknowing*, this may be an influence of Hugh's commentary on his other works, but should not be considered an influence of the Dionysian corpus itself.



Further on in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, the Areopagite makes great use of another triad, that of purification, contemplation (or illumination), and perfection (or union). Although Hugh here comments on every aspect of this classic trio, he never uses it to organize either his other presentations of the angelic powers, as noted earlier, or his thoughts on their ecclesial counterparts. In the *Celestial Hierarchy* and especially in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, this same triadic arrangement (of purification, contemplation or illumination, and perfection or union) was prominently applied to the sacraments, the clergy, and the laity, as is well known. In Hugh's other works, however, he never applied this triad to any of these topics, neither to the sacraments, nor to the clergy, or to the laity, namely, those who perform or receive the Dionysian purification, illumination, and perfection.<sup>50</sup>

## The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*

We turn from the *Celestial Hierarchy* to the rest of the Areopagite's corpus, since the question of Dionysian reception history is not restricted to a work receiving formal commentary. The ancient author's other works were equally at hand and thus potentially influential. In fact, Poirel surmises that Hugh intended to write commentaries on the other treatises as well.<sup>51</sup> Next in the corpus is the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. As mentioned, neither the word 'hierarchy' nor the title 'hierarchy' figures in Hugh's treatment of these matters in *De sacramentis* or any other treatise.<sup>52</sup> The Areopagite's chapter on baptism, there called 'the rite of the illumination', had no effect on Hugh's treatment, which cites the Western Fathers Ambrose and Augustine<sup>53</sup> and goes on to attach something entirely absent in Dionysius and the East in general, namely the Western rite of confirmation.<sup>54</sup> The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*'s chapter on the 'synaxis', similarly, had no discernible effect on Hugh's treatment of 'The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ' in *De sacramentis*. Hugh's detailed concerns about the bread and the bodily presence of Christ are quite removed from the Dionysian interpretations of the rite's many symbolic actions. In fact, Hugh's reuse of his commentary's excursus (that the sacrament is both a figure and also the very substance of the body of Christ) serves, as mentioned, to distance his views from the Areopagite's chapter of liturgical allegory.<sup>55</sup>

The Dionysian sacrament of the consecration of myron (ointment) has no counterpart in *De sacramentis*, although the latter covers many other rites. The Areopagite's presentation of the clergy and their ordination continues the characteristic pattern of triads (deacons, priests, and hierarchs doing the purification, illumination, and perfection), but *De sacramentis* has another special number in mind. For Hugh and other Westerners, there are seven grades of clerics, from porters and readers up to deacons and priests, themselves differentiated by 'dignities', such as bishops and archbishops. In this chapter, Hugh uses Isidore of Seville and Ivo of Chartres extensively (both without attribution), but never Dionysius.<sup>56</sup> The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* went on to discuss monks and their consecration, again without any legacy in Hugh, in either *De sacramentis* or his other works such as *The Formation of Novices*. Hugh goes on to discuss marriage



at great length, which does not appear at all in the Areopagite. While both authors treat death, funerals, and the afterlife, the relative emphases and specific contents are completely different. Hugh, for example, is greatly concerned for death and hell but barely mentions funerals.<sup>57</sup> As a final example of the non-influence of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* on *De sacramentis*, Hugh's concerns for vestments, the dedication of a church, simony, vows, vices and evil works, confession, and anointing the sick all show extensive use of Western traditions, but none of these topics are treated by Dionysius.<sup>58</sup> In summary, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* made no discernible difference to Hugh's presentation of the Church, its rites, and its offices.<sup>59</sup>

## The *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*

Turning to the rest of the Dionysian corpus, this pattern holds true. In contrast to the way Thomas Aquinas later used the *Divine Names* in his *Summa theologiae* (not to mention his commentary on it), Hugh makes no use of this major treatise in his writings about God, the Trinity, or the divine names. The Areopagite's second chapter of the *Divine Names*, on the divine unity and differentiation, bears no resemblance to Hugh's Augustinian treatment of the Trinity in *De sacramentis*, complete with an assumed 'filioque'.<sup>60</sup> Nor does Hugh tap the Areopagite's exegesis of the many biblical names for the divine, even when he presents 'power, wisdom, and mercy' in *De tribus diebus*.<sup>61</sup> On a smaller scale, Hugh's essay 'On the Power of Praying' displays no echo of the *Divine Names*, chapter three, despite its similar title, 'The power of prayer'.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, and by now not surprisingly, Hugh's various comments on the Virgin Mary take no interest in the possible allusion to her dormition in the *Divine Names*.<sup>63</sup> The Areopagite's fourth chapter expounds at length on 'evil' as the absence of good, but Hugh does not use this Platonic commonplace at all in his treatment of the fall and related evils.<sup>64</sup> The overall Dionysian dialectic of God having many names yet transcending them all, of affirmations and negations, is presented forcefully in the *Divine Names* and famously in the *Mystical Theology*, but finds no programmatic traction in Hugh of Saint Victor.

As with the *Divine Names*, so also the *Mystical Theology*. Unlike Bonaventure's later and generous quotation of the *Mystical Theology* at the end of his *Itinerarium*, Hugh makes no use of this tiny treatise or of any part of the Areopagite's corpus in his *Soliloquy* or anywhere else.<sup>65</sup> The (beautiful) *Soliloquy* is not about Moses and the apophatic darkness of Sinai but all about love and the bridal couple of the 'Song of Songs'. Although Hugh knows, and nicely explains, the language of apophatic 'ecstasy' or excess in his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*,<sup>66</sup> the *Soliloquy*'s finale about an ecstatic experience (being taken out of oneself) is not at all apophatic but wholly amorous.<sup>67</sup>

Negative theology, for Dionysius, is a fundamental method for treating everything from the names of God to the appearances of the angels. Hugh may occasionally recognize the transcendence of God, as in his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, but so must every biblical theologian. As with his primary predecessor, Augustine, such

recognitions by Hugh are not expressions of a programmatic negative theology, as they are in Dionysius or Eriugena. Yet, Hugh's emphasis on love as the culmination of the spiritual journey fits his own understanding of the Dionysian corpus, at least one key part of it. As mentioned above and covered more thoroughly elsewhere, Hugh claimed Dionysian warrant for the view that love is higher than knowing (and unknowing), just as the seraphic fire of love is higher than cherubic knowledge. That this viewpoint became influential later on is due in great part to Hugh, and to the attendant belief that it stemmed not merely from the sub-apostolic Dionysius but in fact from a privileged Pauline teaching about the 'third heaven'. In time, the Victorine Thomas Gallus would complete the integration of the Song of Songs and Moses on Mount Sinai, of Bernard and Dionysius, in a synthesis that later found some expression in the *Cloud* author.<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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Coming back to Poirel's paradox and resolution: whether Hugh so thoroughly assimilated the Dionysian corpus that it became invisible in his other works or else did not assimilate it at all, the result is the same: the *Corpus Dionysiacum* had no discernible influence on Hugh of StVictor's works, outside of his commentary on the one treatise. The main Dionysian themes of hierarchy (angelic and human), negative theology (the apophatic with the cataphatic), and the anagogical interpretation of Scripture and liturgy are all missing from Hugh's writings, except for his commentary. Insofar as these are the distinctive features of the Dionysian corpus and of its legacy, as in Eriugena, Hugh is not a Dionysian, but rather an Augustinian, albeit one launching his own Victorine variation. As Poirel himself has said of Suger of St Denis, Hugh 'read Dionysius but he did not truly assimilate his thought'.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Hugh's commentary brought the Dionysian corpus into Western circulation as seen in the Victorines Richard and Gallus, and then Bonaventure and so many others. Thus, even if Dionysius did not influence Hugh, Hugh greatly influenced the Dionysian legacy, as covered elsewhere in this volume.<sup>70</sup>

## NOTES

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1. Dominique Poirel, *Des symboles et des anges. Hugues de Saint-Victor et le réveil dionysien du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 5. To be abbreviated as *Des symboles*. I am much indebted to Poirel for this book, for his edition (see next note) and his other studies, as well as personal conversations and correspondence, even as I offer an alternative interpretation on one point here.
2. *Hugonis de Sancto Victore, Super ierarchiam Dionysii*, ed. Dominique Poirel (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015) CCCM 178. To be cited as *Super Ierarchiam*.
3. 'L'influence sur Hugues du vocabulaire dionysien, hormis bien sûr son commentaire de la *Hiérarchie céleste*, est pour ainsi dire nulle.' *Des symboles*, p. 266. See also p. 492.

4. *Hugonis de Sancto Victore De sacramentis Christiane fide* ed. Rainer Berndt (Munster: Aschendorff, 2008). To be cited as *De sacramentis*. Berndt's index (pp. 632–642) names twenty-nine different works by Augustine, in 185 citations, and none from Dionysius, although Hugh's commentary on Dionysius is cited six times. In general, Hugh did not name his sources in *De sacramentis*, although the last sections include quotations with attributions, perhaps because he did not live to go beyond amassing materials for them. Most of Berndt's citations of Augustine, accordingly, are points of common teaching, without Hugh naming the Bishop of Hippo.
5. 'd'en assimiler la substance, non d'en répéter la lettre,' *Des symboles*, p. 146. 'assez peu perceptible,' 'presque secrete, plus profonde que spectaculaire,' 'peu visible mais profonde,' 'si profonde et si imperceptible,' *Des symboles*, pp. 78, 80, 81, 147. In sum, 'L'assimilation du corpus dionysien est indéniable,' *Des symboles*, p. 80. Poirel suggests that Hugh encountered (and assimilated?) the Dionysian corpus before coming to Paris, which would explain why his extant works show no discernible change on this point. *Des symboles*, p. 504 and 81. See also Poirel, 'Hugo Saxo: Les origines germaniques de la pensée d'Hughes de Saint-Victor,' *Francia Forschungen zur Westeuropäischen Geschichte* 33/1 (2006): 173f.
6. As already suggested in Paul Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 213f., note 23. To be abbreviated as Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*. Previous studies have made similar suggestions. René Roques suggested that Hugh was little marked by Dionysius: *Structures theologiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 364, at the conclusion of a major treatment (294–364). See also Roger Baron, *Études sur Hugues de Saint-Victor* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1993), pp. 217 ff. Further, David Luscombe observes a 'limited influence' in 'The Commentary of Hugh of Saint-Victor on The Celestial Hierarchy,' *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, ed. T. Boiadjev, G. Kapriev, and A. Speer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), p. 173.
7. For this and other general aspects of Hugh's commentary, see Poirel's indispensable edition and thorough monograph (notes 1–2 above).
8. Prologue, *Super Ierarchiam*, 929C, 930C, 931C, and 932B.
9. Moderata et communi faciliq[ue] ad intelligentiam explanatio[n]e. Prologue *Super Ierarchiam*, 931B.
10. Non ut profunda rerum scrutari persequar, sed ut detegam solum et in lucem exponam tecta verborum. *Super Ierarchiam* 960C.
11. *Hugonis de Sancto Victore Didascalicon de studio legendi*, ed. C. Buttmer (Washington, DC, 1939), VI.11.
12. *Super Ierarchiam* 1154C. See the original title ('La boue et marbre') for one of Poirel's chapters, *Des symboles*, p. 8.
13. *Super Ierarchiam*, 1016A, see also 989D990A. For the Prologue, as mentioned above, see especially 925A, 926C, 929D, and 931A.
14. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).
15. Si ergo dicendo non potes, lauda vivendo. Quod lingua non explicat, vita bona commendat. *Super Ierarchiam* 1006D. See also 992D, 1001B, 1017B–1018A, 1029A, 1047A, 1056D to 1059C, 1061 BC, 1079B, 1083CD, and 1130B.
16. Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*, pp. 167–176, regarding *Super Ierarchiam* 1035D–1044D.
17. *Super Ierarchiam* 982B, 1002B, 1023B, 1024AB, 1066D, 1115BC, 1118B, 1118D to 1125B.
18. Gratiae enim illuminatio ista est, non naturae donum. *Super Ierarchiam* 939C.
19. *Super Ierarchiam* 1074D.

20. Besides 939C and 1074D, just quoted, and the Prologue's 926C, see also 937B, 1001D, 1016C, and 1101B; see 1013B for law and grace.
21. *Super Ierarchiam* 955B, 977B, and 1055D. Regarding the Augustinian dictum 'nulla interposita creatura' (*De vera religione*, PL 34: 55.113), see my chapter on Eriugena's anthropology, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian 'Celestial Hierarchy'* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), chapter VI.
22. *Super Ierarchiam* 1093A.
23. *Super Ierarchiam* 1139B.
24. *Super Ierarchiam* 1000A and 1002D.
25. *Super Ierarchiam* 931C, 935C.
26. *Super Ierarchiam* 992BCD.
27. David Luscombe, 'The Commentary,' p. 170f., also citing Beryl Smalley.
28. As Poirel notes: 'Même le mot *hierarchia* ... est introuvable hors de l'*Expositio*'. *Des symboles*, 266f.
29. Roy J. Deferrari for *De sacramentis* I, 5 in *Hugh of Saint Victor on the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), p. 74.
30. *De sacramentis* II, 2, 3.
31. Conrad Rudolph, *The Mystic Ark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 217, as quoted below.
32. IMAGINEM... ET IESV PARTICIPATIONIS IPSAM DIVINISSIMAE EUCHARISTIAE ASSUMPTIONEM; *Super Ierarchiam* 949A, 951B.
33. *Super Ierarchiam* 952AB, 952D.
34. *Super Ierarchiam* 951BC to 953D became *De sacramentis* II, 8, 6–8.
35. See the classic essay by Heinrich Weisweiler, 'Die Arbeitsmethode Hugos von St. Viktor: Ein Beitrag zum Entstehen seines Hauptwerkes *De sacramentis*', *Scholastik* 20–24 (1949): 59–87, 232–267.
36. *Super Ierarchiam* 925C; see the discussion in Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*, pp. 101f.
37. *Super Ierarchiam* 961C, then the mini-essay at 972C to 978D.
38. *Super Ierarchiam* 941C and 946A.
39. *Super Ierarchiam* 941D. *Des symboles*, p. 399.
40. *Super Ierarchiam* 944D.
41. *Super Ierarchiam* 1139AB.
42. See Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*, for such an organization.
43. *De scripturis*, PL 175: 12B, discussed in Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*, p. 20.
44. *Super Ierarchiam* 975A. See also 'Solum hoc dici potest, quod aliud est Deus et quid est dici non potest' at 975CD. Both of these texts occur within a fuller treatment (972C to 978D).
45. *Super Ierarchiam* 1027D to 1032A.
46. *De sacramentis* I, 5, 33 gives the basic presentation; I, 5, 36 adds the sole mention of groups of three.
47. 'The angelic orders of *The Mystic Ark* serve an essentially different purpose from that conceived of by Pseudo-Dionysius. ... [The position that Hugh's *Commentary*] had little influence on Hugh's other work ... is a view that the *Ark* texts and image do little to contradict.' Conrad Rudolph, *The Mystic Ark*, p. 217.
48. *De sacramentis*, I, 5, 35.
49. Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*, Appendix, pp. 167–176.
50. Grover Zinn once outlined how this triad informed Hugh's stages of contemplative ascent in the *Ark* treatises, there is no specific textual support for that claim. Grover Zinn,

- 'De gradibus ascensionum: The Stages of Contemplative Ascent in Two Treatises on Noah's Ark by Hugh of St. Victor,' *Studies in Medieval Culture* V, eds J. R. Sommerfeldt, L. Syndergaard, and E. R. Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: The Medieval Institute, 1975), 61–79. See Conrad Rudolph, *The Mystic Ark*, p. 538, n 763, and Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*, 172.
51. *Des symboles*, pp. 228–239.
  52. *De sacramentis* II, 2 on the Church and II, 3 on orders.
  53. *De sacramentis* II, 6, 2, and II, 6, 7.
  54. *De sacramentis* II, 7.
  55. *De sacramentis* II, 8; the reused excursus is discussed above.
  56. *De sacramentis* II, 3.
  57. *De sacramentis* II, 17; see II, 17, 8 for 'obsequies'.
  58. *De sacramentis* II, 4, 5, 10, 12–15.
  59. For more on each of the Hugonian chapters mentioned here, see my brief summaries of the *De sacramentis* in *Hugh of St Victor*. Regarding the Dionysian chapters in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, see the similarly brief summaries in my *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
  60. *De sacramentis* I, 3, 31.
  61. *De tribus diebus*, ed. Poirel (see note 3 above).
  62. *De virtute orandi*, PL 176: 977A to 984C.
  63. Hugh's Marian essays are surveyed in Rorem, *Hugh of Saint Victor*, pp. 122–126.
  64. *De sacramentis* I, 7.
  65. Grover Zinn ('De gradibus ascensionum ...', p. 78) documents the different roles for Mount Sinai in the *Mystical Theology* and Hugh's Ark treatises, but still speculates that 'Hugh quite probably derived his use of the Sinai imagery from Dionysius'.
  66. *Super Ierarchiam* 983D.
  67. *Soliloquy (De arrha anime)* PL 176: 970AB.
  68. On Gallus, see the studies by Declan Lawell, for example, 'Affective Excess: Ontology and Knowledge in the Thought of Thomas Gallus', *Dionysius* 26 (2008): 139–174, and now especially Boyd Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy in the Theology of Thomas Gallus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For these Gallus texts, see Lawell's editions: *Explanatio in Libros Dionysii* and *Glose super Angelica Ierarchia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), CCCM 223 and 223A.
  69. 'Suger a lu Denys, mais n'a pas vraiment assimilé sa pensée.' Poirel, *Des symboles*, p. 525. See also p. 392f., 499f. See also a similar comment about Richard of Saint Victor by Gervais Dumeige, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 3:328.
  70. Besides Gallus and Bonaventure, see Wayne J. Hankey's argument on the strong place for the Areopagite's works in the Dominican tradition of Albert and Thomas. 'The Concord of Aristotle, Proclus, the *Liber de Causis* & Blessed Dionysius in Thomas Aquinas, Student of Albertus Magnus', *Dionysius* 34 (2016): 137–209.

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## CHAPTER 25

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# THOMAS GALLUS: AFFECTIVE DIONYSIANISM

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DECLAN LAWELL

ACCORDING to Dionysius, there is a third way of knowing God which lies beyond the modes of positive knowing (attributing to God characteristics such as wisdom, goodness, and justice derived from knowledge of creation) and negation (in such a way that God is not, for example, wise in a human sense, or good in an inferior or worldly way). Rather, God is hyper-wise and hyper-good, that is to say, God possesses every attribute in a mode of excellence which is beyond human concepts of goodness etc., and beyond even human negations. For example, God is not just simply not-wise (in a human way), but super-wise, in a way beyond even the negation. As to how humans can access what it means to say that God is a negation of negations is a problem that has vexed commentators ever since Dionysius' writings appeared. Even today, a postmodern thinker such as Jean-Luc Marion can offer his solution and write of his own 'third way'.<sup>1</sup> In the early thirteenth century, Thomas Gallus offered a novel and bold interpretation of what the Neoplatonic 'return' (*epistrophē*) to the divine, which had emerged from its monadic super-excellence, actually means. For Thomas, the only way to be truly united to God is in the soul's movement of love towards God, a love indeed which at its highest peak has no place for the intellect.

## BIOGRAPHY AND WRITINGS

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Thomas Gallus (who died in 1246), possibly of French origin<sup>2</sup> as the name given to him by later commentators suggests, began his career as a university lecturer in the University of Paris where he was an Augustinian canon regular in the Abbey of oSt Victor. The Victorines were originally a reform movement founded by William of Champeaux which reacted to the narrow academic emphasis of some elements of the university in Paris, and placed great emphasis on the inner mystical life and scholarly erudition in order to grow close to God. Thomas absorbed this air of mysticism and



the emphasis on personal devotion so typical of his Victorine order, as is evident in his writings. While in Paris, in 1218, Thomas tells us that he wrote a *Commentary*<sup>3</sup> on *Isaiah* in which he outlined one of his most fundamental ideas, namely that the soul operates in a hierarchical manner, and that, advancing from the lower states of natural apprehension and perception, the soul rises up through various actions. Each one is aligned to one of the nine orders of the angels (for example, knowledge is represented by the order of the Cherubim). On reaching the Seraph of the mind (which is equated with the act of love), the soul truly encounters God in a union which is superior and inaccessible to the intellect, just as the Seraphim are superior in angelic rank to the Cherubim.

This emphasis on love and the return of the soul through love back to the divine simplicity are greatly elaborated upon in Gallus' commentaries on the biblical book, the *Canticle of Canticles*. He published three commentaries<sup>4</sup> on this favourite text of his. While there is a remarkable unity of ideas consistently explained in both his *Canticle* commentaries and his *Dionysian* commentaries, Gallus was quite clear that the emphasis in the *Canticle* works was on the practical side of the ascent of the mystical soul, whereas the *Dionysian* commentaries dealt with the theoretical or conceptual elucidation of this ascent:

We dealt with the theoretical side of [the wisdom of Christians] in the book on *Mystical Theology* ... But we dealt with its practical side in the *Canticle of Canticles*.<sup>5</sup>

By 1224, Gallus was asked by Cardinal Guala Bicchieri to establish a new monastery in Bicchieri's home town of Vercelli in the north of Italy. In the same year he also published his *Glosses on the Angelic Hierarchy*.<sup>6</sup> It was no coincidence that this *Dionysian* work first drew Gallus' attention as it had already been commented on by Eriugena (c. 800–c. 877), John Sarracenus (John Sarrazen, 12<sup>th</sup> century), and Hugh of St Victor (c. 1096–1141).<sup>7</sup> Thomas also glossed the *Mystical Theology* around 1232/33, though this work is generally thought to be lost.<sup>8</sup> Thomas eventually became abbot of the new Abbey of St Andrew which had close links with the nascent Franciscan order. Thomas indeed related how he personally knew St Anthony of Padua. After twenty years of research, he published his most well-known work, the *Extractio*, which was a kind of paraphrase, not a translation, of the writings of Dionysius, written in a 'common style'. The *Extractio* gained a place in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, a thirteenth-century textbook that circulated in the University of Paris and which also contained the translations of Dionysius' writings by Eriugena and John Sarracenus.

Between 1241 and 1244, he wrote a grand commentary on the writings of Dionysius called the *Explanatio*. A lengthy work, it tries to explain the density of Dionysius' writings by intertwining gobbets of the *Dionysian* text with a word or sentence here or there from Gallus' pen which helps the reader to understand the text, or with an *id est* ('that is') where Gallus expounds his own interpretation of a word or phrase. One of the other features of this commentary is the vast amount of quotation from the Bible. Thomas created a Biblical Concordance, to which he sometimes explicitly directs the reader, and he used this to compile long strings of quotations on a word or concept from Dionysius which interested him. Believing that all ideas needed the support of sacred Scripture, Gallus developed an almost psychological compulsion<sup>9</sup> to quote Scripture



(and other texts from Dionysius) to support the point he makes at any given time. The various interlinear and marginal glosses which accrued to the *Corpus Dionysiacum* text-book in Paris<sup>10</sup> place Gallus in a long tradition of minds seeking to penetrate Dionysius' often obscure views.

Towards the end of his career, Gallus was exiled from Vercelli due to his sympathies with the pro-imperial Ghibellines in their conflict against the pro-papal Guelfs. Several accusations appear to have been made against Thomas, and judging from comments in his *Explanatio* of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* against wolf-like clergy in sheep's clothing, he appears to have been critical of such accusers. He fled to the town of Ivrea (not far from Vercelli) where he tells us he finished his *Explanatio* of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. It seems that Thomas managed to return to Vercelli before his death in 1246. Among his other writings there survive a small treatise on the *Spectacles of Contemplation*<sup>11</sup> and a sermon on *How the Life of Prelates Ought to Conform to the Angelic Life*.<sup>12</sup> His funeral monument can still be seen in the church of Sant'Andrea in Vercelli today.

## THE METAPHYSICS OF FULLNESS

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One of the central images which permeates Gallus's writings is the idea of God being a fountain which overflows out of its own plenitude in order to cascade over all creation, filling each being according to its capacity. Each being is thus full, but not equally full, as some participate in God's fullness in a greater way than others further down the hierarchical river and more distant from its source. He is fond of the image of a spring or river which fills all the channels and wells of the world in accordance with their capacity. Thomas thus fundamentally teaches a metaphysics of (divine) fullness and (created) participation. God is an endless source of fullness which can never be exhausted; creation is merely a 'cistern, that is, worldly wisdom', which can be 'totally exhausted and no longer remains'.<sup>13</sup> Thomas also makes frequent use of the word 'flood' (*diluvium*), for example where he likens how each lower order receives from its superior hierarchy the divine beauty, wisdom, and goodness:

just as a flood—inundating wells, trenches, and fissures—flows in, according to the capacity of each one, and equally fills them as it abundantly overflows.<sup>14</sup>

References to the fullness of God abound in Gallus's writings. Indeed, by his own explicit avowal, he believed that no other name came closer to capturing the essence of God than the name of fullness or *plenitudo*:

No word, as it seems to me, rises more sublimely towards an affirmative meaning of the divine, super-unknown infinity than the name of 'fullness'.<sup>15</sup>

This fullness is manifested in the Trinitarian life of God. The Father gives of his fullness to the Son, and the Father and Son in turn communicate that fullness to the Holy Spirit.

The fullness is communicated to humans in the sacraments, especially that of the Eucharist. Fullness is also passed down hierarchically through the nine orders of angels and down further into the human soul. Indeed, Gallus in the *Canticle Commentaries* refers repeatedly to the notions of *influitio* or 'flowing in' (the divine exit from the life of the Trinity into creation), and the 'flowing back' of humanity through the hierarchical soul to God (*refluitio*: 'flowing back'). The task of humans is to be united and almost absorbed back into this fullness. Gallus actually refers to the 'order of flowing back' (*ordo refluitionis*):

And note that he said 'eating' and 'inebriation' first because of the order of flowing back, for he [the spouse of the Canticle] first of all flowed in and then [the bride] flowed back to him, for by [first] pouring himself into them, he [then] draws them back to himself.<sup>16</sup>

In another sense, this journey back to God is a process of simplification. God (simple in essence, multiple in effects, as Gallus likes to repeat) desires to attract the variegated multiplicity of creation back to his simplicity:

For all of the powers of the mind are contemplatively simplified in contemplation of the sublime [God], and thus in a simplified manner they are extended towards the divine fullness which is utterly simple in its essence and utterly multiple in its effects. Hence multiplicity is attributed to the divine super-simple simplicity in Psalm 30f and 150.<sup>17</sup>

Gallus presents the image of a lock of hair which is a simple, unified extension from the head which represents a unified desire to return to the simplicity of God, or to possess in fullness and simplicity what it previously experienced in participation and multiplicity:

A single piece of hair of this kind is what is elsewhere called a lock, that is, a simplification of the desires arising from the highest Seraphim of the mind; Ezekiel 8 (e): 'he took me [by a lock of my hair]'. This one hair or lock penetrates the divine sweetness which is totally desirable.<sup>18</sup>

In short, these passages clearly stress the utter simplicity of the divine fullness to which the multiplicity of created beings long and desire to return to in simplicity and in a union which is only effected by affect or desire.

## THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF LOVE

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For Gallus, God is 'totally non-intelligible, but totally desirable' (*totus non intelligibilis, totus desiderabilis*).<sup>19</sup> He presents an argument to show how the faculty of love or desire

in the soul can embrace infinity by its sheer will and desire, whereas intellect labours piecemeal and step-by-step to fill in the picture of its knowledge. In his *Explanatio* of the *Angelic Hierarchy*, Gallus has mentioned how affect can be drawn more profoundly and sublimely towards God because people 'love more than they are able to understand or investigate'.<sup>20</sup> He then proceeds to explain how people can learn this fact from experience. Although we cannot intellectually grasp or investigate every fact in the world, nevertheless the whole universe of sensible, material beings can be absorbed by the affect in such a way that is almost considered as nothing.

But even if there were as many humans and angels as the grains of sand in the sea or of drops of water or of dust particles in the earth, it would seem a little task for one faithful soul, even of a mortal human, to grasp all of these in the affect. Moreover, what is grasped in God except that he is totally eternal, totally infinite? And what is there in God which is not loved by the affect? Therefore, almost the whole of God is taken up in the affect and is excluded from the intellect.<sup>21</sup>

Gallus' point seems to be that God cannot be comprehended, seized, and grasped by the intellect. We can know some facts—that he is eternal, beyond goodness, infinite etc. But to make every intellectual statement about God would not only require endless effort, like trying to count sand grains on a shore, but would also be immeasurably inferior to any expression of what God is really like in essence. Love or the affect, however, in a single, unified movement to God, can embrace the totality of the divine being, and with only the effort of the will being needed to make this (affective) comprehension.

The consequence of God's infinity, inaccessible to the intellect, is that God can only be completely accessed through love. Gallus is not being anti-intellectualist when he states this. He is quite clear that humans enjoy a twofold knowledge (*duplex scientia*, or *notitia*, or *cognitio*) of God. The first is an intellectual knowledge of God derived (in fact, almost twisted or squeezed out of creation—Gallus uses the verb *extorquere*, 'to twist, squeeze') by the long process of intellectual labour: 'by an ascending investigation this knowledge is squeezed out'.<sup>22</sup> This is the knowledge of philosophy which he does not denigrate. In fact, to eschew the contributions of philosophy is for Gallus a 'heretical depravity'.<sup>23</sup> In the prologue to his *Explanatio* of the *Mystical Theology*, he explicitly states how the knowledge of philosophers comes about by examining creation. Thomas likes to quote St Paul in Romans 1, 20 (a verse quoted no less than 32 times in his *Explanatio*) to show how Scripture backs up his claim here that the invisible attributes of God can be clearly seen in creation.

The journey of ascent (parallel to the journey of descent, described later, in which the affect or Seraphim communicates its experience of loving God down to the lower orders), is closely connected to Gallus' references to the spectacles (*spectacula*). In his treatise on the *Spectacles of Contemplation*, he explains that nature provides various spectacles which can excite the soul and lead it forward to contemplate the creator of these spectacles. At the peak of the mind, however, love alone can gain access to a complete experience of God. Gallus is indebted for many of these ideas to his fellow

Victorine, Richard of St Victor (who died in 1173), prior of St Victor, but he does seem to diverge from his master in his belief that the power of love or desire (the power of desire: *vis desiderativa*) can contemplate the divinity alone and beyond intellect:

hence it is concluded that the power of desire, or union, or the peak of the affect, as it rises, exceeds the theoretical intellect incomparably more than the theoretical intellect exceeds the imagination or even our bodily senses.<sup>24</sup>

Gallus is insistent, in all his writings and throughout his entire career with an almost trance-like repetitiveness, that the soul has another vase, the container of love, so to speak, which is superior to the intellect. In the *Glosses on the Angelic Hierarchy*, Gallus explains:

Note however that vision or contemplation according to the intellect is praise according to the affect. Each hierarchy therefore exercises and extends both [vases] towards God so that it may fill both vases from the fountain of wisdom (Ecclesiasticus 1) and from the fountain of life (Psalm 35). But since the intellect properly is receptive of beauty, just like the sight of colours and shapes of which sensible beauty consists, the united and unifying affect however is receptive of universal fullness.<sup>25</sup>

Once again, Gallus' prioritizing of affect over intellect on the path of rising simplicity back towards the fullness of the divine summarizes the key messages that Gallus consistently wrote about over his whole career, even in this early text from 1224.

He calls this unifying power of the human mind affect, desire, love, union, or the Seraph of the mind, and just as the Seraphim are higher in the hierarchy than the Cherubim, so too does love stand above and beyond intellect. Love is intimately bound up with the 'wisdom of Christians' (*sapientia Christianorum*) which exceeds philosophy. Indeed, when the soul enters its Seraph, the Cherub of the mind (intellect) is abandoned and left behind.

The highest perfection for minds is to be united to the divine fullness, which alone is fuller and better than every mind ... This adhesion or union comes about through love which joins and unites the mind to God, and by uniting it to that fullness, perfects it ... This perfection is higher and deeper than the enlightenment that comes from knowledge ... Therefore in it alone is fulfilled the portion of Mary which is not taken away (Luke 10g), on account of the love which through the Seraph of the mind exceeds the mirror, but does not die.<sup>26</sup>

Intellect therefore sees God reflected in the mirror of creation; unifying affect embraces the very fullness of God in a direct experiential manner which excludes the intellect. Again, this is not to scorn the contributions of the intellectual life. It is rather a statement of Gallus' conviction that love can gain access to a more comprehensive experience of the divine than intellect.

## THE BOILING OVER OF ECSTASY

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This experience of the divine is described in a myriad of ways by Gallus, all of which labour to say something about the ineffable. The soul experiences ecstasy at this highest level, and enjoys a presence and a taste of God which cannot be rationalized or explained intellectually. In fact, it is the sensory apparatus of taste, smell, and touch which Gallus promotes over the other senses. While intellect can see and hear various things, and communicate these to other people, no one can communicate the taste of honey, the smell of roses, or what it feels like to touch silk unless one has personally experienced these sensations. Fundamentally, Gallus is presenting an argument from experience, and no one can know about this unless such a person experiences it personally. In this regard, Gallus likes to quote Apocalypse 2, 17: 'no one knows unless he receives'.

Such an experience of the loving presence of God almost takes the soul out of its own nature through ecstasy. Thomas likens this experience to a 'boiling over' (*ebullitio*<sup>27</sup>) of the soul, similar to a pot of boiling water which, under the influence of heat, causes water to overflow and exceed the limits of the pot: this is like the soul, enkindled by the fire of divine love, which overflows beyond its nature, far beyond intellect, to be united to God. In this passage, Gallus explains that the Seraphim possess the quality of being *superfervens* ('over-boiling'):

AND BOILING OVER: with regard to their ecstatic love of the highest good and beauty, concerning which *DN* 4p. And those minds are said to be in a continuous and excessive rapture ... However, minds thus extended towards God boil over, so to speak, just as water heated up to a high degree jumps over itself through the power of the fire.<sup>28</sup>

In another suggestive image, Gallus likens the mind to a pillar of smoke or steam rising upwards. The contemplative mind 'is evaporated due to the boiling fervour of its devotion, like steam is evaporated from a hot liquid, almost rising up through a vacuum without a ladder, without the demonstrations of philosophical considerations'.<sup>29</sup> Gallus' typical subordination of philosophy to the loving will is noteworthy once again, as is the idea that in ecstasy the soul almost passes beyond the barrier of human nature (just as steam leaves a hot cup of tea to become a new substance) in order to be absorbed and united with the divine.

## ASCENDING AND DESCENDING KNOWLEDGE

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Something of this loving experience of God can also flow back down from affect to the intellect. It is hard to be certain what Gallus means by this idea that the Seraph of the mind (love) can communicate to the lower orders or faculties of the mind (especially

knowledge). Nonetheless, he is clear that in the same way that there is an ascending rise of knowledge to God (philosophy), so too there is a descending communication of knowledge, not just in the sense that the data of revelation are communicated, but also because the experience of love in the highest pinnacle of the affection (the *apex affectionis*) seems to provide a psychological certitude that the data of revelation are true and can be more firmly believed. Or perhaps, Gallus intends to claim that this ineffable presence, sweetness, and experience of God, which is a unique datum or sensation that the intellect can examine and ponder upon, can be used as evidence of the presence and existence of God. Gallus frequently employs the Latin word *experientia* (e.g. 'in the ears of my experience') and its cognates, and speaks of God as being *presentissimus* or 'very present' to the soul.

While the reader may desire a scholastic treatment of what exactly Gallus means, he does repeatedly indicate that the memory of the experiential union in love (order of Seraphim) can trickle down and percolate through to the intellect (order of Cherubim). While philosophical knowledge is squeezed out of creation by the ascending investigation and contemplation of the various spectacles and pieces of evidence the world offers<sup>30</sup>, the descending path seems to be the infusion of a memory of experience which was granted to the loving will alone. Glossing the phrase 'we will rejoice remembering your breasts' in the Canticle, Gallus explains that this statement is made in the mental order of the Cherubim, i.e. the intellect. This exultation occurs on the peak of the intellect which has been drawn as close as it can be to the affect. The intellect is thus mindful of the sensual experience of the affect in the hierarchically superior order, and this recollection gives the intellect strength, joy, and the 'boiling fervour of the affect which is side-by-side with the intellect'<sup>31</sup> at this point. If the intellect enjoys the sustenance of the *collateralis affectio* (the 'collateral affect' or 'affect which is side-by-side' with it in the peak of the intellect), then there is a descending infusion of direct experience of the divine which seems to aid the intellect and encourage it to keep directing its intellectual efforts in order to return again as frequently as possible to the divine spouse.

It can be argued then that the experiential recollection of love gives the intellect strength; but in other places, Gallus is even more explicit about the feats of affect. In *Explanatio* of the *Angelic Hierarchy* 7, he explains his familiar doctrine that there is a two-fold knowledge (*duplex notitia*) of God. He then continues:

Note however that both here and above in the same chapter (h), affective knowledge is placed before intellectual knowledge, because affective knowledge examines the depths of God (I Cor. 2e) and it acquires the light of intellectual knowledge: John 5: *burning* and afterwards *shining*.<sup>32</sup>

Thomas is adamant—intellectual knowledge of God exists and is valid, but there is also another knowledge gained by the experience of loving union. Such knowledge, however, cannot be communicated or rationally explicated—it can only be tasted, felt, experienced.

## SPIRITUAL LIFE: IMITATING THE ANGELS

It was while reading chapter 10 of Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* that Gallus gained his central insight into the psychological structure of the soul. Dionysius tells us that the angels are divided into nine orders, and indeed that the mind has its own parallel divisions. This inspired Gallus to move from considering the ontological nature of the angels towards a psychological interpretation of these ranks. The lower three orders (Angels, Archangels, Principalities) designate the sphere of (human) nature; the middle three (Powers, Virtues, Dominations) are the area of human effort or *industria*; finally, the three highest orders (Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones) are the domain of grace alone where the mind does not act but is acted upon by God who inspires love and knowledge in thrones of the soul which are thus receptive to divine influence.

The operations of the angels thus provided Gallus with a template for the spiritual life. The angels contemplate God, yet nourish their lower ranks while also drawing nourishment from those ranks above them. In the prologue to his *Canticle Commentaries*, he outlines each of the orders of angels and explains their psychological counterpart in the mind: for example, the Seraphim represent love, the Cherubim knowledge, the Thrones indicate the receptive ability of the mind to receive God, and so on. After all, Thomas tells us that it is not within our ability to go out of ourselves (i.e. in the ecstatic experience of God), but to try to extend oneself with all one's might (*industria*) to try to move from the order of Dominations into the Thrones where God alone operates by his grace. The Dominations represent the apex, the pinnacle, or summit of the intellect and of love, where the soul strives with all intensity to suspend (the *suspendium*) the operations of human effort (*industria*), and seeks no longer to act, but to be acted upon by God in the three highest orders.

The Dominations is also the order in which resides the 'spark of synderesis' (*scintilla synderesis*<sup>33</sup>). Synderesis is a term which is a corruption of the Greek word for conscience.<sup>34</sup> In St Jerome, it refers to the spark of moral conscience by which humans know good from evil. In the field of ethics, it is extremely difficult to provide a definition of what goodness is in itself, and how we can recognize right from wrong. For Jerome, synderesis was an irreducible foundation in the mind which enables it to grasp moral goodness, almost in a way beyond rational demonstration. Gallus provides a radically new meaning for this term by transferring it from the ethical plane and reinterpreting it as foundational, irreducible grasp of the divine which is accessible only to the power of love. What Jerome ascribed to conscience, Gallus ascribed to love. Synderesis is a 'power of the soul' (*vis animae*) just like intellect. There are 'two powers' then in the soul (*duae vires*), knowledge and love, but only love can grasp the divine infinity in a direct and superior manner.

While not claiming exclusive originality for this idea that the soul has a unique power, that of desire or affect, Thomas does insist that this is a 'new skill' or new way of doing theology. Discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, Gallus tells the reader that the



philosophical intellect cannot discover or demonstrate the Trinity-in-unity of God, but that eventually someone came along (he is referring to Richard of St Victor) who founded a new art on the basis of the experience of the affect ('*novam artem super affectus experimentum fundavit*'<sup>35</sup>). What could this foundation of the experience of the affect mean in practice? Gallus gives an example which again gives further evidence of how the Seraph of the mind cascades down into the Cherub to bring the support of affect to the intellect:

Often through the experience of seething love, the mind is illuminated and strengthened (*illuminatur et roboratur*) so that the articles of faith about the Trinity, previously apprehended by a slender faith, may be understood—though not fully [understood]—to be thus, and that they ought not or cannot be otherwise.<sup>36</sup>

This is indeed a new science—that the experiential ecstasy of an encounter with God can rebound downwards to the intellect, and both enlighten and strengthen that intellect with the data gained uniquely and exclusively in the power of loving union.

At this point, it is worth comparing Gallus' views with those of the other great Dionysian commentators of the thirteenth century to throw into relief how different his new interpretation was.<sup>37</sup> For Albert (c. 1200–1280) and Aquinas (1225–1274),<sup>38</sup> the third way or way of union is an intellectual apprehension of the data of revelation given in Scripture. While ecstasy may be concomitant with such an intellectual grasp, these Dominicans are insistent that intellect and love are always in concert together. For Gallus, this is incorrect<sup>39</sup> and he believed that he was teaching a new science about how love extends to where the intellect has no access. As the Canticle 1, 4 put it, 'I am black, but beautiful' ('*nigra sum, sed pulchra*')—black because intellectually unknown; beautiful because the savour, feel, and scent of the bridegroom are tasted, touched, and smelled by the bride seeking to reach God in a place of ecstasy where the intellect is deaf and blind. Despite their friendship, Grosseteste also seemed to disagree with Gallus.<sup>40</sup>

What is most interesting in Gallus is his utter insistence that, however much love and knowledge are intertwined in the eight lower orders of the soul ('they are mixed in every order, except in the Seraphim alone'<sup>41</sup>), at its summit in the ninth, there is no room for intellect. It is this disjuncture which has often led to Gallus being labelled as anti-intellectual, despite his respect for philosophy and the invitations in his texts to engage in scholastic disputations. The question naturally arises—does the power of the soul, the power of love, which unites directly with God, since the spark of *synderesis* is a 'pure participation'<sup>42</sup> in deification, actually need the laborious procedures of intellect? Later movements, such as the Heresy of the Free Spirit, and the Beguines, clearly felt that intellect and Church sacraments could be bypassed by the erotic love of God. It must, however, be stressed that at least for Gallus, love is a power which, though superior, is intimately and hierarchically bound up with intellect. The Seraphim reveal more than intellect, certainly; but they are in constant (ascending and descending) dialogue with the Cherubim. The paths of philosophy and affect are ascending and descending, but always along the same hierarchical continuum or spectrum, ever approximating to or flowing from the divine plenitude.

## DIVINE UNKNOWNABILITY

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Despite the tendency of Gallus to focus on the knowledge of love, for him there remains always a divine substratum which is utterly unknown—even to love. And in this regard, Thomas Gallus is clearly faithful to the Dionysian agnosticism, despite the very Augustinian influence that had already been attached to the body of Dionysius' writings through Hugh of St Victor and John Sarracenus. The apophaticism stressed in Eruigena, an intrinsic part of the Parisian textbook, was not neglected by Gallus. Despite the bold claims Gallus often advances for the power of love to be able to experience God, in the end even it falls short of the fullness of the divine. Referring to the *duplex cognitio* or 'two-fold knowledge' gained through affect and intellect, Thomas states:

The other [affect] is incomparably more sublime than that [intellect]; the affect is outside of and above the intellect through its union to God, although God is invisible and not intelligible, but totally desirable. Nevertheless, the infinity of the divine, sublime nature is ineffably placed above both of those types of knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

The mind can certainly know God intellectually and taste God affectively, but ultimately there is a divine essence which evades the comprehensive vision and which cannot be totally tasted or savoured. The divine 'sparkling' or 'flashing' (Gallus speaks of this *coruscatio*) constantly confounds all the human faculties.

## CONCLUSION

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Gallus' texts have only recently been fully edited for the first time, and in many ways the history of his reception and influence remains to be written.<sup>44</sup> However, some immediate influences are worth signalling. Bonaventure (1221–1274), like Grosseteste, was clearly influenced by Gallus' 'angelization' of the human soul. For him, as for Gallus, the human spirit 'becomes hierarchized' (*hierarchicus efficitur*)<sup>45</sup> in its journey to God. The names Bonaventure ascribes to the grades of the soul's ascent to God—*nuntiatio*, *dictatio*, *ductio*, *ordinatio*, *roboratio*, *imperatio*, *susceptio*, *revelatio*, and *unctio* or *unitio*—are taken from Thomas' descriptions in the Prologues to his *Canticle Commentaries*. The idea of the fountain of plenitude in Bonaventure's writings<sup>46</sup> may also have been influenced by Gallus. Gallus and Grosseteste were friends who most probably met in England, and were in correspondence through the Franciscan, Adam Marsh. Mention has already been made of Eckhart, and religious movements such as the Heresy of Free Spirit, while it cannot be forgotten how the English author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* makes abundant use of the Abbot of Vercelli's writings. Richard Rufus (of Cornwall) employed direct quotation from Gallus,<sup>47</sup> while Rudolf of Bierbach was another writer known to have drawn freely upon Gallus' ideas.

What was the essence of Gallus' ideas which influenced these various authors? Thomas Gallus represents a distinctive and new interpretation of Dionysius—due to the exclusive prominence he gives to love and affect, Gallus's thought can rightly be termed an affective Dionysianism. When Dionysius urges his readers to abandon and strip away all knowing and unknowing in order to enter the divine darkness in super-intellectual union, Gallus brought the Augustinian–Cistercian–Victorine tradition of emphasis on love to bear upon this darkness of unknowing. While remaining true to the fundamental teaching of the Areopagite on the divine unknowing, Gallus believed there was a way to approach closer to the divine through the faculty of love, a distinct power of the soul with its own distinctly perceived data, much as the power of knowing has its own conceptual data. This Christian and Augustinian interpretation makes him stand out in the history of Dionysian interpreters. In completing his project, which occupied his whole life, he bequeathed a lexicon of terms to describe the inner life of the ecstatic soul which had a notable influence on several later thinkers, the history of which waits to be written. His method of 'angelizing' or 'hierarchizing' the soul after the manner of the angels represents a further, distinctive contribution to spiritual theology. While the reader will look in vain in Gallus' works for the scholastic precision of an Albert or an Aquinas, what will be found instead are the fervent writings of a man who consistently taught that God is accessible in a unique way via love alone. The reader will also seek in vain for the exegetical rigour and linguistic expertise of a Grosseteste in Thomas of Vercelli, yet will be rewarded with an accessible and provocative insight into the obscurity of a writer such as Dionysius whom Gallus laboured 'with what sweat, and with what night-vigils!' to expound.<sup>48</sup> Nor can Thomas' production of a Biblical Concordance be overlooked in terms of its utility to thirteenth-century scholars. Thomas tells us that he directed his writings to souls that were less learned and erudite (the Franciscans moved their study centre from Padua to Vercelli where Gallus taught) than many scholastics, and it is in this project of communicating his teaching on love in a popularizing manner that Thomas reveals himself a master of the spiritual life.

## NOTES

1. See for example 'Faith and Reason' (p. 145–154) in Marion 2008 and elsewhere (e.g. Marion 2006) where Marion appeals to the order of charity or love as having its own logic and rationality which is inaccessible to metaphysics.
2. In reality, his place of origin is not known. Saenger 2005 has even suggested he has a Welsh or English origin. I am grateful to Csaba Németh for notice of this article.
3. Thomas republished a portion of the *Commentary* at the end of chapter 10 of his *Explanatio* of the *Angelic (Celestial) Hierarchy*. Whether Thomas commented on the whole of Isaiah is not so clear.
4. The first one is thought to be lost. See Barbet 2005 for a discussion of the first commentary. The second and third are published in Barbet 1967.
5. *Explanatio* AH, Preface (p. 472, l.19–21). All references to the *Explanatio* are from Lawell 2011. All translations are my own. AH = *Angelic Hierarchy*, EH = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, DN = *Divine Names*, MT = *Mystical Theology*.

6. Lawell 2011b. Gallus preferred the translation 'Angelic' as opposed to 'Celestial' for this Hierarchy, possibly because of the central importance of the angels in his conceptual framework.
7. The *Divine Names* had also been commented on by William of Lucca (*d.* 1178), ed. Gastaldelli 1983.
8. It has been held that these glosses are found in the set of commentaries ascribed to Peter of Spain by M. Alonso, and to Thomas Gallus by J. McEvoy, but see Lawell 2009a for an argument against such ascriptions. MS UV6 in the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena, contains an Exposition of the *Mystical Theology* which is attributed to Thomas. I am currently editing and evaluating this text.
9. Robert Grosseteste had some sharp words for such a practice. It should be noted that Gallus and Grosseteste were friends, and indeed Gallus visited the Church of St Andrew in Chesterton, Cambridgeshire, at which time he probably met Grosseteste. Grosseteste was writing his own translations and commentaries on Dionysius *c.* 1239–1242, at more or less the same time as Gallus was writing his *Explanatio* (1241–1244).
10. See Dondaine 1953 for the history of the development and structure of this textbook.
11. Lawell 2009b.
12. Lawell 2008a. Gallus also wrote a lost Sermon on Pentecost (*Iam advenerat tertius dies*), and possibly a Sequence, or commentary on a Sequence, called *Super mentem exultemus* (lost).
13. See Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II, 4E (Barbet, p. 98).
14. Gallus, *Explanatio* EH, 1C (p. 748, l.233–236).
15. Gallus, *Explanatio* EH, 4M (p. 894, l.875–877).
16. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II, 5A (Barbet, p. 101).
17. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 7L (p. 598–599, l.495–499).
18. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* III, 4E (Barbet, p. 182).
19. Cf. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II, 4B (Barbet, p. 92).
20. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 10A (p. 638, 260–263).
21. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 10A (p. 638, 267–273).
22. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II, 1A (Barbet, p. 69).
23. Gallus, *Explanatio* EH, 1E, (p. 756, l.445–449).
24. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* III, 5A (Barbet, p. 204–205).
25. Gallus, *Glosses on the Angelic Hierarchy*, 3B (p. 29, l.89–95).
26. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 3D (p. 548–549, l.330–345).
27. The image would later appear in the writings of Meister Eckhart.
28. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 7B (p. 585, l.119–123).
29. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II, 3C (Barbet, p. 170).
30. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II, 1A (Barbet, p. 69).
31. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II, 1B (Barbet, p. 71).
32. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 7K (p. 597, l.448–451).
33. This is another of the key items of vocabulary which are hallmarks of Gallus' writing style and thought. For a detailed study of Gallus' lexical field, see Lawell 2009c.
34. See McGinn 1998: 88 n. 268: 'The term *synderesis/synteresis* goes back to Jerome's *Commentarium in Hiezechielem* as a corrupt reading for the Greek *syneidēsin* meaning "conscience". Thomas Gallus seems to have been the first to use the term in a mystical sense.'
35. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 10 B (p. 641, l.348–350).

36. Gallus, *Explanatio* AH, 10 B (p. 641, l.335–358).
37. For a further discussion, see Lawell 2021.
38. Did Albert and Aquinas know of Gallus? It seems hard to conceive that the Abbot of Vercelli, whose *Extractio* circulated in the University of Paris, would be unknown to them. See Lawell 2012, p. 175–180 for a further discussion. Furthermore, Dondaine (in his book, *Le corpus dionysien*) has adduced evidence to show how Albert ‘practised’ the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, that is, that Albert employed not just the translations but also the various interlinear and marginal glosses.
39. See Lawell 2012.
40. See further my discussion of Grosseteste in this volume.
41. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* II (Barbet, p. 87).
42. Gallus, *Canticle Commentary* III (Barbet, p. 111).
43. Gallus, *Explanatio* DN, 7H (p. 382, 435–440).
44. See one recent survey of Gallus’ vision in Coolman 2017. See also Lawell 2008b.
45. See Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* IV, 4 = Quaracchi 1891: 307.
46. See e.g. Bonaventure, *I Sent.*, d. 27, p. 1, a. un. q.2 = Quaracchi 1882: 468–474.
47. I am grateful to Csaba Németh for this information.
48. Gallus, *Extractio* AH, Prologue, in Pedro Hispano, ed. Alonso 1957: 509.

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## CHAPTER 26

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# DIONYSIUS IN ALBERTUS MAGNUS AND HIS STUDENT THOMAS AQUINAS

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WAYNE J. HANKEY

‘DIONYSIUS nearly everywhere follows Aristotle as will be evident to anyone diligently examining his books.’<sup>1</sup> For this judgement, the great Thomist scholar Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895–1990CE) supposed Aquinas (1225–1274CE) ‘to have been duped by certain external resemblances’.<sup>2</sup> However, if in fact there are dupes here, the first was Albertus Magnus (1200–1280CE). From his great teacher, Albert the Dionysian Peripatetic, Aquinas, for whom the Areopagite remained a quasi-biblical authority but identified by him in the end as a Platonist, learned the fundamental congruence of the doctrines of the greatest philosophical authority—Aristotle (384–322BCE)—and his match in the higher realm of Christian theology—Dionysius (sixth century CE).

## ALBERT, THE DIONYSIAN PERIPATETIC

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Aquinas had been initiated by Albert into what Alain de Libera called ‘The “way” of Dionysian peripateticism’,<sup>3</sup> when, from 1245/46<sup>4</sup> to 1251/52, Thomas was his student, first in Paris and then from 1248, in Cologne. In the advanced *studium* the Dominicans directed Albert to establish there, ‘the greatest Dionysian commentator of the thirteenth century’,<sup>5</sup> explicated the entire Dionysian *corpus* and began his explanations of the works attributed to Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> Evidence that Thomas studied both authors with him are manuscripts of Albert’s commentaries on the *Dionysian corpus* and of his lectures on the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle. For the former, we have Thomas’ autographs, written out for Albert as his assistant.<sup>7</sup> Thus ‘he copied the whole set of Albert’s [Dionysian] commentaries by hand’ and also inserted annotations.<sup>8</sup> For the *Ethics*, we have a *reportatio*



by Thomas. Importantly for the differences which evolved between their ways of thinking, Albert did not start his paraphrastic expositions of the Aristotelian *corpus* until the one devoted to the *Physics* in 1251/52. Soon after that, Thomas left for Paris. Burger stresses that 'when Albert was commenting on the texts of Aristotle, and finally on the *Liber de causis*, Thomas was in Paris and in Italy. So their ways, like their thinking, were separated'.<sup>9</sup>

'In the autumn of 1251, or at the latest 1252, [Aquinas] commenced his career of teaching at the University of Paris by cursive reading of two books of the Bible'.<sup>10</sup> These lectures qualified him to comment on the *Sentences*, obtain the *licentia docendi*, the status of *magister*, and a chair. Thomas' *Sentences Commentary* is his largest theological system. Commenting on the second book Thomas made his observation about Dionysius following Aristotle, 'during the academic year 1252–53' or the next,<sup>11</sup> when he was still strongly under the influence of Albert.

No longer determined to possess the medieval scholastics as changeless doctrinal and philosophical authorities,<sup>12</sup> we now value the developments or radical shifts of mind required by Albert's reconciliation of what is most strongly opposed in Latin Christendom's thirteenth-century intellectual world: the Augustinian Platonist tradition vis-à-vis Dionysius and apophatic theology, on the one hand, and Aristotle, mediated by Arabic philosophy, on the other, with their overlaps. Equally, we prize Aquinas' continuation of these syntheses, while reaching back behind both the Arabic and Latin philosophers to the Greeks. He sought the fonts from which philosophy flowed in primal purity and traced the history of its progress and errors for use as arguments. His Plato (428–348BCE) and Aristotle were largely framed for him by the late ancient Neoplatonists and Peripatetics William of Moerbeke (1215–1286CE) made available. In fact, they had mediated what were for Aquinas the two greatest philosophers to the Arabic and Latin philosophers he mostly knew.<sup>13</sup> In scholastic theology, changes in understanding of the history of philosophy have doctrinal implications. When Platonism is reevaluated positively and Dionysius is understood to follow and modify a school of thought whose acme is Proclus (410–485CE), rather than Aristotle, a change Aquinas' mind underwent,<sup>14</sup> theology is shaped differently.

Albert's thinking went through several stages.<sup>15</sup> His largest shift is the one by which Dionysius, matched with Aristotelian philosophy in its Arabic Neoplatonic–Peripatetic medium, provided the system within which his Latin Augustinianism is placed. The Latins were confronted with a new intellectual reality, terrible in its totality. As a result of its Arabic transformations, preceded by Byzantine developments requiring that Neoplatonism be hidden within commentary on Aristotle, the thought of the Stagirite appears in the Latin West as: 'a total philosophical *corpus*, where all of Hellenistic thought, profoundly Neoplatonized, had slipped—sometimes surreptitiously'.<sup>16</sup> The last great wave of Aristotle's works arrived not only with the Cryptoproclean *Liber de causis*, taken to be the theological pinnacle of his philosophy, but also, first, with important systematic works of Avicenna (980–1037CE). Then came Averroes' (1126–1198CE) commentaries received in phases.<sup>17</sup> Edward Booth writes of how Latin Christendom's philosophers and theologians were 'almost overwhelmed':

as the proportion of Christian to non-Christian thinking was now thoroughly altered with the onslaught of Aristotle on Plato's metaphysics now unexpectedly disclosed and expressed ... in the rigorous systems of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, for which no equivalent existed."<sup>18</sup>

The reason for Albert's Peripatetic Aristotle with its complementary and deeply similar Dionysius is here. This powerful system required a matching one. Albert provided it and did better. He countered and reconciled philosophy to Christian revelation and Avicenna to Averroes in his Aristotle. Amos Bertolacci details how Albert united Averroes and Avicenna in his paraphrase on the *Metaphysics*. They play different roles: 'Averroes helps to explain the text, Avicenna contributes to the doctrinal enrichment'.<sup>19</sup> Albert can receive and correct both because 'of an elaborate theoretical apparatus by means of which he accounts for and solves the conflict between the metaphysics of the two authors'. Characteristically, he focuses 'on similarities and sweeps away differences'.<sup>20</sup> Dionysian peripateticism is a total response to the new totality Latin Christendom faced.

## Albert: Augustine and Greek Negative Theology, Dionysius, and Aristotle

Before confronting this new philosophical world, Albert had responded, in a way presaging his appropriation of Dionysius, to a reassertion of Augustinian norms in the 1241 condemnation by the Bishop of Paris. William of Auvergne (1180/90-1249CE) excommunicated those asserting that 'the divine essence in itself will be seen neither by humans nor by angels'.<sup>21</sup> Bernard Blankenhorn comments: 'By targeting the scholastic Greek [especially Dionysian]-Eriugenan-Avicennian syntheses, the 1241 condemnations rendered suspect the whole of Greek patristic eschatology and negative theology'.<sup>22</sup> Albert aims, both in his teaching on the vision of God, and, later, in his exposition of Dionysius, to save these.

This involved a doctrine of created grace by which the human is strengthened to be capable of knowing the essence of God. Also required is an interpretation of Dionysius where God is named 'being', and is thus accessible to mental vision. The radically negative character of the conclusion of the *Mystical Theology* (derived from Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*) is reduced;<sup>23</sup> the difference between what is known of God *in via* and *in patria* strengthened. For these Albert will employ, as Aquinas will also do, 'the distinction between the mode of signification and the [mode of] the reality signified'. Thus, greater clarity will be brought 'precisely where Dionysius wants to move beyond cognitive activity'.<sup>24</sup> The endeavour to keep both sides of polar oppositions is typical of Albert.

Without knowing what he is doing, Albert separates Dionysius from Proclus in order to save him for the Augustinian West. Aquinas working later, in virtue of his painstaking reading of the *Elements of Theology*, will understand what is going on. Aquinas took up Albert's endeavour to save Dionysian apophatism within the limits set by the condemnation of 1241. He will use the same means, with more strongly kataphatic results.

Albert's mature system depended on the concord laboriously worked out, with the Dionysian commentaries, on one side, and the Aristotelian ones, on the other. The former appeared in the 'traditional Parisian order for the books: the *Celestial Hierarchy*, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the *Divine Names*, the *Mystical Theology*, and the eleven *Epistles*'.<sup>25</sup> Their form, analogous to the one Albert will adopt for his paraphrases of Aristotle, is 'running commentary that integrates almost the entirety of the primary text interspersed with disputed questions on doctrinal questions'.<sup>26</sup> In the latter, Albert undertook to transmit 'The philosopher', Aristotle, to the Latins, to be for them what Averroes had been for him, 'the *Commentator* par excellence'.<sup>27</sup> When, about fifteen years after Aquinas left him, he completed his Aristotelian 'paraphrases with digressions'<sup>28</sup> by his *De Causis et Processu Universitatis a Prima Causa*, 'composed between 1264 and 1271',<sup>29</sup> Albert had not fundamentally modified his position: 'His Peripatetic profession of faith is constantly reaffirmed'.<sup>30</sup> The Peripatetic–Dionysian concord is the adequate response to the Aristotelian totality. It includes Plato, as he believed it must: 'If Albert is not concerned to attach the *Liber* to the Platonism of Proclus, it is because he has already attached Plato to the Peripateticism of the *Liber*'.<sup>31</sup>

## The Student Differs: Dionysius, Platonism, and the History of Philosophy

In contrast, Aquinas' expositions of the *De Divinis Nominibus* of Dionysius and of the *Liber de causis*, and his treatise *De Substantiis Separatis*, written in that order between 1267/68 and 1272, reveal an important reversal in Thomas' understanding. William of Moerbeke's translations of the Greek commentators and Proclus forced and enabled him to separate from Albert by recognizing the Platonism of the *De Divinis Nominibus*, 'a possible first in medieval Latin Christendom',<sup>32</sup> as well as of the *Liber*. Writing about how they explain similarities between the *Liber* and the *Divine Names*, Thérèse Bonin articulates the difference between Aquinas and his teacher:

Thomas rightly attributes the similarities to the Platonism of both texts, whereas Albert believes that Peripatetic and Dionysian theology converge.... Not that Albert failed to recognize Platonic traits in Dionysius, but such thinkers as Ibn Sina shared them while remaining basically Peripatetic.<sup>33</sup>

Thomas' last works, beginning with his *In De divinis nominibus*, manifest a deep, extensive, and sympathetic knowledge of Platonism with Proclus as its acme. He discerned the difference between Platonic and Aristotelian interpretive approaches and styles of discourse. A pinnacle of his accomplishments as philologist, philosopher, and theologian is his reconciling progressive histories. In them Aquinas brings out differences in order to describe, as Aristotle had, how philosophy moves step by step, compelled by the truth of things.<sup>34</sup> From this same time, starting in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas uses these progressive histories as philosophical arguments.<sup>35</sup> In them, Platonism now plays an essential positive role in arriving at the truth. His last, the *De Substantiis Separatis*,

makes this clear. Here, and elsewhere in these histories, Aristotle resembles Proclus more and more, despite sharp differences.<sup>36</sup>

After setting out, in Chapters 1 and 2, both the 'opinions' and the necessary movements from ancient physicists to Plato and from Plato to Aristotle, Aquinas gives us their agreements (Chapter 3), and their differences (Chapter 4). In the latter, Aristotle is usually, but not always, right. Crucially, truth lies with that on which Plato and Aristotle agree. After this is established, Dionysius comes in at Chapter 18 to confirm these positions:

Since therefore it has been shown what the foremost philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, believed about the spiritual substances as to their origin, the condition of their nature, their distinction and order of government, and in what respect others disagreed with them, through error, it remains to show what the teaching of the Christian religion holds about each individual point. For this purpose, we shall use especially the writings of Dionysius who excelled all others in teaching what pertains to spiritual substances.<sup>37</sup>

What the greatest philosophical authorities, at scientific reason's roots agree, is confirmed as Christian doctrine by the unexcelled authority of Dionysius. This is Thomas' final judgement, probably made at the same time as: 'Dionysius was in most things a follower of the opinions of the Platonists.'<sup>38</sup>

Despite these developments, for Aquinas what he had learned about the similarities of Aristotle and Dionysius remains determinative for him. His conviction about the agreement of the Philosopher, of the author of the Propositions of the *Liber*, of Dionysius, and of Catholic truth survives from his discipleship to his most historically and philosophically sophisticated writings. Indeed, it is set out most clearly in his *Super de Causis*, detailing the derivation of the *Liber* from the *Elements* of Proclus, a recognition which made no discernable difference to the content of his philosophical and theological positions. So close are Dionysius and the *Liber de causis* in the eyes of Aquinas that he even suggests that the author of the *Liber* is dependent on Dionysius.<sup>39</sup>

Recent changes in the scholarly understanding of the history and character of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies help us to understand the puzzling judgements of Albert and Aquinas. Crucial is new thinking about Proclus, and thus also about the 'Cryptoproclean'<sup>40</sup> works, showing how Aristotle is drawn into, and conveyed by, late ancient Platonism. In consequence, Aquinas became authentically Aristotelian in virtue of what he took from Proclean Neoplatonism and Dionysius. We shall look at these developments later.

## Matching Quasi-Biblical Dionysius with a Complete Philosophical *Corpus*

Albert begins his *Super Mysticam* by ascribing to the treatise the mode of 'Scripture, which is attained by divine inspiration and cannot be subject to error'. Thus, Dionysius

becomes 'a quasi-biblical author'.<sup>41</sup> All of Albert's Dionysian commentaries date from the Cologne *studium*, where he 'deliberately chose to place the Greek father's entire *corpus* at the heart of the formation program'.<sup>42</sup> De Libera judges:

[Albert] made from the *corpus* of Denys an alternative, on the whole, to the scholastic *corpus* of magisterial and university theology. This is the most important innovation of Albert: to have answered 'Yes' to the question of knowing if the works of Dionysius 'suffice' to fulfill the obligations of the theologian's *métier*, if they cover, in summary, the entirety of 'the theological task'.<sup>43</sup>

The Peripatetic philosophy to which Albert matched Dionysius was so complete that Aquinas began his *Summa theologiae* by asking whether any other knowledge is needed.<sup>44</sup>

It is significant that Albert delivers one of his strongest eulogies of philosophy when commenting on Dionysius' *Seventh Letter*. Aquinas, moved by much the same exigence, labours at his expositions of the *Aristotelica* up to the end.<sup>45</sup> In *De divinis nominibus* stands at the beginning of a renewal of this work, his principal way of doing philosophy apart from Sacred Doctrine. Thomas' death left several Aristotelian commentaries in the state of his *Summa theologiae*, unfinished.

Albert, on the *Seventh Letter*, teaches that philosophical reasons are not principles in asserting the truth of the faith; they are brought in as secondary and useful, especially against philosophers who must be addressed with the reasoning proper to them. Albert denounced 'the ignoramuses who wish, by every means, to combat the use of philosophy ... like brute animals who blaspheme what they do not understand'. He goes on to cite Romans 1.19 on the divine wisdom given by God to philosophers.<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere, he has theological principles founded on revelation and inspiration and not on reason, so philosophy does not dispute them.<sup>47</sup>

Examining the use of 'philosophy the handmaid of theology' in Albert and Aquinas, Robert Crouse shows that for them the formula is not primarily about a subordination of philosophical to revealed theology, but about their equality, which is why I have written of 'matching'. The phrase, derived from Aristotle, refers:

to the relationship which obtains between the particular philosophical sciences and theology, whether theology takes the form of metaphysics, or the form which it has in sacred doctrine, deriving its principles from revelation. *Theologia*, for these doctors, though double in form, is radically one. ... [B]oth forms ... are divinely given modes of sharing in the one divine science. [T]hey cannot, when rightly apprehended, be contradictory.<sup>48</sup>

The problem of a relation between two theologies 'lies in the recognition, by Christian doctors, of a genuine and coherent expression of divine science in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle'.<sup>49</sup> Although Aquinas makes the relation hierarchical, Albert does not.<sup>50</sup>

Because both are autonomous, their existence alongside one another requires that each be self-limiting.<sup>51</sup> Henryk Anzulewicz judges 'Albert the Great was the first to recognize this necessity'. '[T]he self-limitation of theology, a scientifically valid

demarcation of philosophy, as well as a redefinition of the relationship between theology and philosophy' was required.<sup>52</sup>

For Albert, theology is affective science, practical in a way Aquinas will not concede. Both theologies are 'concerned with the ultimate cause of all things in the divine intellect, but with different perspective.'<sup>53</sup> Scriptural theology:

is concerned with final cause as *finis intentionis*, according to which man is united in intellect, affection and substance with Him who is worshipped as *finis beatificans*. Thus sacred doctrine would be properly described as *affectiva*: it is *scientia ad pietatem*; and at the highest level, the speculative power would appear to be 'hand-maid' to the practical.<sup>54</sup>

There are several dilemmas here, including the relation of theology to ethics, stemming from theology's object being the good as both known and willed.<sup>55</sup> Albert's statements necessarily shift, depending on which of the two relations to God he has primarily in view.<sup>56</sup> His problem is acute because he is an heir of Eriugena's (810-880CE) affective reading of Dionysius, by translating 'suffering divine things' as 'an affection (*affectus*) for divine things'. The *Parisian Corpus Dionysiacum*, which he and Aquinas used, 'witnesses the birth of "Affective Dionysianism"'.<sup>57</sup> That theology is affective science for Albert is a measure of the weight and character of his following of Dionysius.

That *corpus* contained glosses from Eriugena. Michael Harrington writes, a thirteenth-century editor added:

excerpts from Eriugena's ... *Periphyseon*, many of them passages that commented directly on the *Divine Names* ... The *Divine Names* now not only contained Eriugena's translation of Dionysius, but his own philosophical commentary on Dionysius.<sup>58</sup>

Harrington concludes that Aquinas is 'generally friendlier' to the Eriugenian glosses here than Albert is, though neither know their source. He reports on one gloss:

Reason, Eriugena says, is prior to authority in nature, though authority is prior to reason in time. ... We now come to understand the scriptures by discovering the same reason according to which they were composed. As Eriugena puts it, the scriptures are 'nothing other than the truth discovered by the virtue of reason and commended by the holy fathers'. We are back to the 'virtue of the theologians' mentioned by Dionysius, which the Greek scholiast identifies as the flower of the intellect, and which Eriugena identifies here as a creative employment of reason.<sup>59</sup>

This disturbed Albert. Eriugena seemed to contradict Dionysius:

Albert's solution is to say that Dionysius is talking about the relation between human reason and divine authority, while the commentator is talking about the relation between divine reason and divine authority. 'Divine authority depends on divine reason', Albert says, 'but we do not know the reason of divine authority. It is, as



Augustine (354-430CE) also says, that God has made all things by a just judgment, even if it is hidden from us' ... Divine reason is the ground of divine authority, but divine authority is the ground of human reason when it attempts to speak or think about the divine nature.<sup>60</sup>

Albert makes theology dependent on the power of God, rather than on an extraordinary power of the human mind.

Aquinas, at the place in *On the Divine Names* thus glossed, without addressing the comments explicitly, uses Dionysius to elevate human theological activity, remarking:

it is significant that he does not say 'in the holy discourses', but 'from the holy discourses'. The consequence is that 'whatever can be drawn out from those things that are contained in Holy Scripture is not foreign to this doctrine, even if it is not contained in Holy Scripture.'<sup>61</sup>

For Aquinas, Sacred Doctrine is directly subalternate to God's own knowing, not to Sacred Scripture (as Bonaventure [1217-1274CE] would have it instead). So Sacred Scripture, which Aquinas uses as a synonym for Sacred Doctrine, includes the knowledge of the humans who convey scriptural revelation, the doctors of the Church, and the professors of theology.<sup>62</sup> Human knowing is elevated in a way consistent with other features of his theology.

## Flux: Creation as Emanation

In Albert's Cologne experiment, Dionysius and Aristotle acquire new characters by being juxtaposed. So far as they can complement and support one another, and live with its Augustinian heritage, Latin Christianity can be at home in a fundamentally changed intellectual world. Albert's crowning demonstration is his interpretation of the *Liber de causis*, together with its Peripatetic fellows, through Dionysius for the doctrine of creation as emanation. Dionysius enables this by preserving more completely, as well as modifying thoroughly, the Proclean foundation of his theology than does the *Liber*.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, Dionysius sometimes plays the role for Albert which the *Elements of Theology* perform in Aquinas' *Super de causis*; he supplies steps in the Proclean logic dropped in the *Liber*.<sup>64</sup> Albert's doctrine of creation as flux comes from joining the Dionysian structure of emanation and return, derived from Proclus, to the *Liber*. For the first, God is Platonically above being; for the other, God is being, in the mode of Aristotle and Plotinus' *NOUS*. Albert unites them.

For the *Liber*, God's outpouring is single. This goes with the doctrine, 'From the simple one there is nothing except one'. Albert derives it from an epistle of Aristotle, received and explained by Alfarabi (872-950CE), Avicenna, and Averroes.<sup>65</sup> He judges that 'all Peripatetics conceded it', indeed, 'all philosophers before us granted it' as the order of nature, except Avicenna (1021-1070CE).<sup>66</sup> Ignorant theologians denied it; they



are wrong. Dionysius supports it. Albert quotes from *De Divinis Nominibus*, 5.6, to show both his support for the principle and that differentiation and distance from the simple source go together.<sup>67</sup> The flux is self-communication. Albert's primary authority for this as characteristic of divinity is the 'bonum est sui communicativum et diffusivum' of Dionysius, which is the basis of the processions.<sup>68</sup> As with Aquinas, 'emanation' is used interchangeably with 'procession'. So, 'In this matter, Albert believed, the Peripatetic theology of the *Liber de causis* amounted to Dionysian theology'.<sup>69</sup>

There is a compelling transition to Aquinas at this point. When he comments on the *Divine Names*, he confronts a treatment of emanation from the Good which requires massaging to save it from natural necessity. The Latin translation of the Dionysian text read:

Just as our sun engages in no ratiocination or act of choice, but by its very being illumines all things, giving to each of them in their own way a participation in the light to the extent of their capacities, so it is with the Good, which exists far above the sun, an archetype separated beyond its obscure image, through its essence it sends the rays of its complete goodness to all existing things proportionately.<sup>70</sup>

Thomas comments that 'the divine *esse* is his act of understanding and his act of willing, and, therefore, what he makes through his own being, he makes through intellect and will'. On this account Dionysius said 'distinctly' that God is distinguished from the sun in the way in which an archetype stands above an obscure image.<sup>71</sup>

Albert shows us that the acorn does not fall far from the tree. In a question at this point he united Dionysius with the *Liber* and explained the Areopagite through Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Avicenna. Divine agency differs from natural agents, which do not act through their essences. The divine essence acts 'according to its own will and its own wisdom ... because its *esse* is its act of knowing and its action is its substance'.<sup>72</sup> Bonin notes that 'many medieval philosophers not only accepted emanation, but gave it a new prominence'.<sup>73</sup> Albert and Aquinas, as disciples of Dionysius, belong to this community.

## THOMAS, THE PLATONIST DIONYSIAN

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Having approached Albert through his response to an Augustinian inspired ecclesiastical condemnation, we come to Aquinas' treatment of Dionysius through another condemnation under the same inspiration. Aquinas escaped this one by dying twelve years before it was pronounced, but it had his fundamental philosophical position in view. It shows us how radically disruptive his Aristotelianism was and why it needed the support of Dionysius.

'In the human, there is only one form, the rational soul, without any other substantial form'. In April 1286, the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham (c. 1230-1292CE), condemned this proposition, the one from which all the other 'heresies' he listed followed.<sup>74</sup> The Aristotelian doctrine of the unicity of substantial form is central to

Thomas' philosophical theology. Blankenhorn estimates that he was 'the first to follow through on the unicity of form's major doctrinal consequences.'<sup>75</sup> Peckham opposed: 'the profane novelties' which destroy the Augustinian doctrine of the Church.<sup>76</sup> He asserts repeatedly that these opinions are contrary both to reason and to the testimony of the saints. How did Aquinas have the audacity to 'reject and scorn the evident assertions of the saints' above all Augustine?

Thomas could not have moved from an almost universally held Latin philosophical theology with the sanction of the saints without equal or even superior holy sanction for his revolutionary philosophical framework. From the beginning to the end of his writing, it is clear that the required support came from 'Blessed Dionysius,' described in his *Sentences Commentary* as: 'the disciple of Paul, said to have written of his visions.'<sup>77</sup> Booth defends Aquinas' judgement. It 'was arrived at from a systematic comparison of [Dionysius'] thought with Aristotle's: "Dionysius autem fere ubique ... ." This investigation no doubt included his study of Albert's method of receiving peripatetic thought into a Pseudodionysian context.'<sup>78</sup>

In Albert's *studium* Aquinas heard the Aristotelian and Dionysian doctrines on the question Aquinas was determining when he made the 'fere ubique' remark.<sup>79</sup> That is, the nature of heavenly bodies: are they composed of four elements, like sublunar bodies, or of the fifth, and therefore different? Dionysius follows Aristotle in separating heavenly from sublunar bodies, and Thomas places himself on the same side as these two greatest authorities in their respective sciences, parting from other 'expositors of scripture,' who followed Plato (he names Basil (330-379CE) and Augustine).<sup>80</sup> When treating the metaphysical, physical, and theological questions involved in the nature of the heavens and their motions, as he comments on the *Dionysian corpus*, Albert united the *Liber*, attributed to the Philosopher, Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *De Caelo* with Dionysius' positions, just as Aquinas would himself do in the *Sentences Commentary*, and not only there.<sup>81</sup>

Study in Albert's Cologne laboratory is the single most important element in Thomas' formation. Albert's turn from Augustine in this period leads the way to Thomas' determination about unicity of the human substantial form:

From the first pages of the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy* Albert quietly announces the advent of a new anthropology that moves away from key aspects of his previous Augustinianism and toward an Aristotelian-Dionysian emphasis on the soul-body unity.<sup>82</sup>

We quote Blankenhorn further because Aquinas adopts all these positions from the start of his own teaching:

[Previously for Albert,] the intellect is more or less proportioned to know spiritual realities directly. ... In contrast, the Dionysian commentaries present a vision of the human intellect naturally at home in the material cosmos. The divine light comes to us through the sensible veils of the liturgy and physical creation because all of our knowledge naturally begins with sense experience ...<sup>83</sup>

In his *Super De caelesti hierarchia*, Albert cites the Philosopher: 'our intellect is in potency only to those things which can be perceived through sensibles, but it is in potency to spiritual things proportionally through some light superadded to nature, namely grace or glory'.<sup>84</sup> Aquinas goes to the same text of Dionysius for this epistemology, together with the apophatic theology it implied for Albert as well.<sup>85</sup> Aquinas links Dionysian apophatism with Aristotle's comparison in *Metaphysics* 2 of our intellect in respect to the most intelligible to the eyes of the bat (or the 'night bird') in the light of day.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the hiddenness of God results from the weakness of our intellect and from the inadequacy of creatures as media in respect to the most intelligible. This determines their interpretation of Dionysius. Explicating the Dionysian knowing by unknowing, Albert responds to an objection from Augustine that the highest things, including God, are known in the highest way, they are in the soul through its own essence.<sup>87</sup> Albert replies that the vision of God:

has much non-vision because of the object's eminence, as the Philosopher says. Yet it must be known that Augustine's saying is false. For in order that something be known ... it [must] be informed by its form and so brought into act ... Hence, the Philosopher says that the intellect understands itself as it understands other things.<sup>88</sup>

## Aquinas judges that Dionysius Uses Platonic Style

Sometime after March 1266, when William of Moerbeke had finished his translation of Simplicius *On the Categories of Aristotle*,<sup>89</sup> Thomas composed *In De divinis nominibus*. At the same time, he started using Moerbeke's new translations or revisions of Aristotle's texts, 'the first to use them', rather than ones with which he and Albert had worked, as well as Moerbeke's translations of the Greek commentators, some before they were complete.<sup>90</sup> Themistius and Simplicius show up in another exposition written at this time, his *Sententia libri De Anima*, using the *translatio nova*. *In De divinis nominibus* employs the new translation and the Simplicius commentary, with its comparison of Platonic and Aristotelian approaches, and defence of the former against the unjustified attacks of Aristotle and the Peripatetics. Along with these additions to his resources, came changes. Beginning his *Summa theologiae* at this time, Thomas ordered it in a way radically different from the structures in which his theology had been forced to fit. Essentials of his new ordering 'as the material demands',<sup>91</sup> he found in Dionysius.

The synonymous *Sacred Theology*, *Sacred Doctrine*, *Sacred Scripture* begin, as Dionysius teaches, 'Lumine divinae revelationis', i.e. from God's theology.<sup>92</sup> 'Scripture's *raison d'être* is positive knowledge of God that moves towards final beatitude';<sup>93</sup> knowledge is both means and end, and, contra Albert, theology is a theoretical science. The first articles of the *Summa theologiae*,<sup>94</sup> deciding this, also determine Thomas' interpretation of Dionysius, just as Dionysius determines its structure and character.

Overall, and in many of its divisions, this *Summa* has the *remaining* ('in Deo continentur omnia'), going-out (*exitus*), return (*reditus*, 'ad Deum convertuntur

omnia<sup>95</sup>) form of the *Dionysian corpus* as Albert explained it in his *Super De divinis nominibus*. The *Divine Names* looks at God 'according to the outflow of caused things from the cause'; the *Mystical Theology's* perspective is 'the resolution of caused things into the cause'.<sup>96</sup> Aquinas' *de deo* begins with the Dionysian names of the divine substance,<sup>97</sup> arranged in the *exitus-reditus* circular structure of the *Divine Names*.

Imitating this, and in accord with two principles in it, Thomas starts his treatise on God's names with the divine simplicity and returns to that under the form of unity. Aquinas and Dionysius begin with the simple monad in a way which accords with a Proclean principle Thomas states *In De divinis nominibus*: 'unity has the nature of principle'.<sup>98</sup> The names return to unity as the inclusive perfection at which the conversion of the divine simplicity upon itself arrives.<sup>99</sup> Aquinas orders his consideration of God in Himself by the *de deo uno* and *de deo trino* division he finds in the *Divine Names*. Dionysius says that he separated the consideration of the undifferentiated and the differentiated names into distinct treatises;<sup>100</sup> Thomas imitates him. Treating creatures, he is explicit that he uses a triad he finds in Dionysius, and later identifies as Proclean,<sup>101</sup> which structures spiritual beings.<sup>102</sup> Even 'grace does not destroy nature but perfects it', grounding the fundamental *quid pro quo* between nature and grace in his system,<sup>103</sup> comes from Proclus by way of Dionysius and Albert.<sup>104</sup>

The Proceum of *In De divinis nominibus* announced Thomas' break with his teacher: 'much of the style and way of thinking of Dionysius was that used by the Platonists'. In his *Super De divinis nominibus* Albert had taught 'that Dionysius smashes the Platonists' erroneous notion of the divine processions (e.g. being, life) as gods, the only reference to the Platonists in the work'.<sup>105</sup> For Albert, the Platonists wrongly 'posit that all natural forms exist *per se* and primarily'. He credits Aristotle with mocking separate forms of natural things, just as Dionysius smashed the divine ones.<sup>106</sup> Far from identifying Dionysius' modes as Platonist, Albert turns Aristotle's criticism into an accusation of idolatry: the 'Hesiodistae' are 'idolatrae' who posit an 'idol of peace'. The principles of Plato are 'idolatrous substances' which they said to be gods.<sup>107</sup>

In contrast, Aquinas worked out the Proclean Platonism of both the *Liber* and the *De Divinis Nominibus*, beginning with the latter. Nonetheless, Albert set questions his student must answer. The first was whether Proclus' hierarchy of hypostasized abstractions could be reconciled with the one God. *In De divinis nominibus* gives a qualified 'yes', and depicts Dionysius as if he had given the same answer. It, and *Super De causis*, are responses to Proclean Platonism where Aristotle appears on the side of Dionysius as corrector of error. Elsewhere, we have argued for why it is probable Thomas read Moerbeke's translation of the *Elements* before expounding the *Divine Names*.<sup>108</sup> Here, describing features of Aquinas' Dionysian Platonism, we proceed as if he had.

## Aquinas' Dionysian Platonism: Aristotle and Proclus

In the Proceum, placing the *Divine Names* in relation to Dionysius' other writings, Thomas tells us that in them all, culminating in the *Mystical Theology*, 'what God is

remains hidden and unknown,' 'since it exceeds everything which is apprehended by us, it remains unknown to us.'<sup>109</sup> On this, both he and Albert unite Dionysius, Aristotle, and the *Liber*. Having insisted throughout that the hiddenness of God is owed to the inadequacy of the creature, when treating the final Chapter of the *Divine Names*, Aquinas indicates that he knows the Proclean position for which God is unknowable in principle, and asserts that Dionysius rejects it.<sup>110</sup> In *Super Librum de causis*, Aristotle leads the way against Proclean Platonism and helps Thomas avoid what was condemned in 1241.

Aquinas discerns something about Platonism which will increase in importance for him. He sees that the Dionysian 'way of speaking,' which includes, for example, a dangerous failure to distinguish between non-being and privation,<sup>111</sup> and style, were those used by the Platonists. The 'obscure' style of Dionysius and the Platonists may be a bad teaching method, but it enables sacred things to be hidden from the derision of infidels, and helps reconcile positions which seem contradictory, like those of Plato and Aristotle. Following Simplicius, Aquinas finds that obscure and poetic speech is Platonic and suitable to theology, but that Aristotle and his followers interpret and refute it as if Plato were speaking literally. If the truth underlying the metaphor is sought, reconciliation is possible.

As to the truth and error of Platonic abstraction, in common with Albert, Aquinas rejects abstracted universals of the world of nature. However, in strong contrast, Aquinas writes that, insofar as the Platonists spoke of the first principle, 'their opinion is most true and consonant with Christian faith. Thus Dionysius names God sometimes good itself, or super-good, or the principle good, or the goodness of all good.'<sup>112</sup> Later Aquinas specifies that the Platonists posited 'separated principles mutually distinct in respect to the First Principle.' He goes on: 'Dionysius agrees with them in one way, and disagrees in another. He agrees in that he too posits life existing separately per se, and likewise wisdom, and being, and other things of this kind. He dissents from them, however, in this; he does not say that these separated principles are diverse actual beings, but that they are in fact one principle, which is God.'<sup>113</sup>

In the last analysis, Aquinas also teaches this. By their abstractions the Platonists add intelligibility both to the structure of creation and to the divine being. By adopting them, Dionysius increases knowledge. The insistence that they are aspects of a single principle and are united in its creative activity comes, for Aquinas, from Aristotle. Aquinas takes pains to be sure we see that Dionysius is with the Philosopher on this, because there lies the consonance of both with the Catholic faith.

The fundamental Platonic distinction which confers benefits and dangers for theology Aquinas states in Chapter IV of *In De divinis nominibus* on the Good. It comes where it does among the names because they are governed by the logic of emanation and 'the common principle of all processions is the good.'<sup>114</sup> The treatment is in accord with the Platonic way of thinking as outlined in the Prooemium: 'Because the divine Essence itself is goodness itself, which does not happen in other things: God is good through his own essence and all other things by participation.'<sup>115</sup> Thus, the governing method is clear: 'In respect to separate substances, the Platonists distinguish objects of

understanding from states of understanding.<sup>116</sup> Later, when comparing the *Liber* and the *Dionysian corpus* with *The Elements of Theology*, Thomas sets out a full picture of the many levels in the Platonic, i.e. Proclean, spiritual cosmos. The most universal forms are called 'gods' because of their universal causality.<sup>117</sup> He tells us that Dionysius corrects this position in the *Divine Names*: 'For it must be said that all these [*per se* goodness, *per se* being, *per se* life] are essentially the one first cause of all from which things participate all perfections of this kind'.<sup>118</sup> Dionysius turns these gods into names of one principle. Aquinas follows him.<sup>119</sup>

Expositing Dionysius 'On Peace,' Thomas discerns Dionysius making the same point about these Platonic 'gods,' 'creators, as if they operated through themselves for the production of things,' which Albert had made, but without the language of idolatry. Indeed, for Aquinas, taking away what is erroneous, Dionysius brings out what is true in such Platonic talk: 'they are speaking of God who is the one supersubstantial principle and cause of all; and God is called *per se* life or *per se* being, ... because he himself is his own act of living, and his own life, and exceeds all being and life which is participated by creatures, and is the existing principle of living and being for all'.<sup>120</sup> Aquinas makes clear that this divine causality takes place not by a Platonic separation of the *intelligibilia* from the *intellectualibus*, but because the intelligible object and the intellectual subject are identical in God.<sup>121</sup> This enables God to be the single cause both of the whole common existence and of what is proper to each individual.<sup>122</sup> The two are contained in one act of his self-knowledge. That the Dionysian notion of how God knows is Aristotle's, Aquinas asserts repeatedly in the *De Substantiis Separatis*<sup>123</sup> and *Super De causis*.<sup>124</sup>

In the latter, Aquinas begins with the Proclean dependence of the hierarchy of intellects on the hierarchy of separate forms, because the intellects participate the separate intelligibles in order to understand. 'But following the view of Aristotle,' Aquinas writes, 'which on this matter is more consonant with the Christian faith,' we do not posit separate forms above intellects 'other than the separate good itself to which the whole universe is ordered as to an external good, as is said in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics*'. Separate intellects get what they know from participation in the first separate form, 'pure goodness which is God himself'. He encompasses all perfections: 'For he alone knows all things through his essence'. Aquinas concludes this passage with Dionysius who says that 'from the divine wisdom itself the intelligent and intellectual powers of the angelic minds have simple and blessed understanding'.<sup>125</sup>

Here is what in the Proclean Dionysius is fundamentally Aristotelian, the justification of the beginning point of this essay. Booth's study of the fate of Aristotle's 'aporetic ontology', where substance is both generic and radically individual, concludes with Thomas' philosophical theology as 'The "Aufhebung" of radical Aristotelian ontology into a Pseudodionysian-Proclean ontology of "Esse",<sup>126</sup> developing potentialities in Albert's synthesis. The direction Proclus gave Platonism, corrected and extended by Islamic and Christian monotheists, most authoritatively in the *Liber* and the *Corpus dionysiacum*, enabled Thomas' recuperation of Aristotle's ontology of individual substance. Asserting God himself to be "ipsum esse" in the manner of Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas saw each thing as directly dependent on him'.<sup>127</sup>



Thomas's ontology should not be regarded as primarily Cryptoproclean, and its openness to Aristotelian thought not a concession, still less a contradiction, but a development of Aristotelian virtualities, existing particularly in Pseudo-Dionysius's ontology. Thomas's Aristotelian ontology is a prolongation and development of Pseudo-Dionysius's Aristotelianisation of Proclus's ontology.<sup>128</sup>

This judgement expresses the new scholarly consensus: Blankenhorn writes easily of 'Proclean-Dionysian' and 'Aristotle-Dionysius' fusions.<sup>129</sup> Pasquale Porro asserts that "Thomas ascribes to Pseudo-Dionysius ... [what] is actually a combination of Aristotelianism and Pseudo-Dionysius (and indirectly Proclean Neo-Platonism)."<sup>130</sup>

## Blessed Darkness

For Albert and Aquinas, both Aristotle and Dionysius must be negative theologians, as they themselves are, but differently. The differences are signalled by a linguistic fact: Albert uses the language of theophany prolifically. Aquinas uses it once in his entire *oeuvre*, early in his *Sentences Commentary*, then never again.<sup>131</sup> Albert states the problem which makes his student avoid this language and requires both Dominicans to interpret Dionysius through Aristotle: 'Dionysius posits theophanies; a divine theophany is a likeness, not God Himself; however, he says that some of the blessed see God in theophanies.'<sup>132</sup> Nonetheless, Albert concludes in this place and consistently that all angels see God immediately, 'both the superior and the lower ones.'<sup>133</sup> Indeed, 'God will be seen *in patria* through his essence by angels and the saints, ... in the way that he is an object to himself.'<sup>134</sup> Albert squares this circle, as indicated earlier, by developing the doctrine of created grace. Blankenhorn writes of Albert's 'original contribution' a cornerstone for his new synthesis: 'theophany as a double gift of uncreated light that is God's manifesting himself and a created gift of glory disposing us.'<sup>135</sup> By way of theophany as double gift, Albert gets both mediation and immediacy.<sup>136</sup> Without 'theophania', Aquinas will follow Albert on created grace.

Although Albert establishes the foundation on which Aquinas built, the weights the two give the knowledge and ignorance of God are different. Albert comes down more strongly for apophatism. It is indicative of the subtle differences that Albert chooses to keep the Eriugenean-Dionysian language of theophany and to modify it elaborately and creatively;<sup>137</sup> Aquinas drops the language but keeps the radically new doctrine Albert developed.

*Metaphysics* 2.1 helped Albert and Thomas judge that Aristotle and Dionysius taught the same about our ignorance of separate substance and for the same reasons. Here Thomas learns that: 'the difficulty experienced in knowing the truth is due principally to some weakness on the part of our intellect.'<sup>138</sup> For Aquinas, the consonance of Aristotle and the Platonists includes the incomprehensibility of God. Human reason is too weak, but also the First cannot be included in a genus through which it would be defined and understood.<sup>139</sup> There is also, crucially, an important difference.



Aquinas uses Proclus to explain why the superessential unity of the Platonic Principle is entirely beyond being known.<sup>140</sup> Both *In De divinis nominibus* and *Super De causis* fix a great gulf between Dionysius, the *Liber*, and Aristotle, on one side, and the *Platonici*, on the other. The Platonic First is unknowable because it exceeds being. In contrast, ‘according to the truth of things,’ and thus Dionysius, ‘the first cause is above existing things insofar as it is infinite actual being (ipsum esse infinitum).’<sup>141</sup> For Aquinas our ignorance is confined to this present life and the union of soul to this body: ‘in this present life our intellect is not so joined to God as to see his essence but so that it knows of God what he is not.’<sup>142</sup>

*Metaphysics* 2 brings Aquinas to our starting point, the doctrine Archbishop Peckham condemned as the worst of all; the human soul is by nature the actuality of a body. Thus, ‘it has a natural aptitude to know the truth about corporeal and sensible things.’ They are known by abstracting forms from phantasms, what the human soul is fitted for. ‘However, by this process, it cannot be elevated to the level of knowing the quiddities of immaterial substances because these are not on the same level as sensible substances. Therefore it is impossible for the human soul, which is united to this kind of body, to apprehend separate substances by knowing what they are.’<sup>143</sup> This certainly ‘destroys and erodes ... everything which Augustine teaches on the eternal laws and the immutable light, the faculties of the soul.’<sup>144</sup> Albert and Aquinas were harsh realists. The condemnation presupposes that Albert and Thomas choose. What Paul preached to Dionysius, ‘the Unknown God’.

For Aquinas, at the end of the way of negation the wise man remains, ‘in a kind of darkness of ignorance.’ In this life, ‘by ignorance we are joined in the best way to God, as Dionysius says, and this is the kind of darkness in which God is said to dwell.’<sup>145</sup> Dionysius is a guide to the darkness which is God’s habitation and the most intense light. When commenting on I Timothy, Thomas tells us that the clouds and the darkness are in fact light: ‘Dionysius answers: “all darkness is inaccessible light”. And hence that which is here called light, and [in Exodus and Psalms] called darkness, is the same; but darkness inasmuch as [God] is not seen, and light inasmuch as he is seen.’<sup>146</sup> Aristotle is not forgotten, the excessive excellence of the divine intelligibility is ‘like the sun to the eyes of a night bird’. The cloud of darkness is the way into and the place of perfect knowledge.

## NOTES

1. Aquinas, *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum* [herein Aquinas, *Super Sent.*], 2 d. 14 q. 1 a. 2 co. For Aquinas, I usually use the online texts at <http://www.corpusthomicum.org>; when I am using another text, it will be clear from the citation. I am deeply grateful to Dr Evan King for many helps and kindnesses as I wrote this chapter.
2. Torrell 1993: 186.
3. A subtitle used by De Libera 2005: 239.
4. Much dating of the lives and the works of Albert and Aquinas remains undetermined and controversial. This hyphenated form indicates an approximation of the consensus. Hankey

- 2016, considers in detail the dating of Thomas' *In De divinis nominibus* of Dionysius. I refer to this article to provide scholarly backing beyond what I can give here.
5. De Libera 2003: 73.
  6. For the dates and order, see Albertus Magnus 1972 [herein Albert, *Super De divinis nominibus* or *Super DDN*], vi, with the modifications required by Burger 2009.
  7. Porro 2016: 5; Oliva 2006: 207–224.
  8. Burger, 'Thomas Aquinas', 562 and 569.
  9. Dr Maria Burger to me 17 August, 2016, for which I am most grateful.
  10. Oliva 2007: 235.
  11. Oliva 2007: 235.
  12. See Pini 2012.
  13. Gauthier 1959: 55\*; Hankey 2001: 331–334; Hankey 2002a: 161–175.
  14. Hankey 2002b: at 279–284, 286–288 and 310–325; Hankey 2016, *passim*.
  15. See Blankenhorn 2015 with its chronological treatment of his thought. A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 20.
  16. De Libera 1991: 20. See Endress 2000.
  17. Tugwell 1988: 10. Although slightly out of date, Tugwell's biography of Albert is the best available in English. On the reception of Averroes, see De Libera 1990: 232. 232.
  18. Booth 1983: 161.
  19. Bertolacci 2013: 604.
  20. Bertolacci 2013: 606.
  21. *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* in Denifle 1889, §128.
  22. Blankenhorn 2015: 102.
  23. Blankenhorn 2015: 105–107, 114, 116–117.
  24. Blankenhorn 2015: 117–118.
  25. Blankenhorn 2015: 123.
  26. Blankenhorn 2015: 123.
  27. Libera 1990: 267 and 242.
  28. Bertolacci 2013: 605.
  29. Bonin 2001: 5. I adopt her dates because they are the most inclusive. She rightly rejects Fauser's argument for a *terminus ad quem* of 1268. See Albertus Magnus 1993a [herein Albert, *De Causis*], v. 1264 to 1267 are the most likely; a later date would explain why Aquinas and Albert do not refer to each other's treatments of the *Liber*.
  30. De Libera 1990: 38.
  31. De Libera 1992: 119.
  32. Blankenhorn 2015: 326.
  33. Bonin 2001: 146, note 30.
  34. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.3 984a18, *Physics*, I.10 188b29–30; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [herein *ST*], I<sup>a</sup> q. 44 a. 2 co.
  35. Aertsen 1993: 28. His polemical *On the Unity of the Intellect against Parisian Averroism* uses history as argument but does not otherwise fit the pattern I describe. See Hankey 2001: 331–334.
  36. Hankey 2016: 190–201.
  37. Aquinas 1968 [herein *De Substantiis*], 18, D71, lines 3–12.
  38. Aquinas 1982 q. 16 a. 1 ad 3, 283, lines 389–390.
  39. Aquinas 2002 [herein *Super De causis* or *SDC*], prop. 4, 33, lines 11–12.
  40. The term is that of Booth 1983.

41. Blankenhorn 2015: 157. Albertus Magnus 1978a [herein *Super Mysticam*], 1, 453, line 10.
42. Blankenhorn 2015: 122.
43. Libera, *Raison*, 277–278.
44. Aquinas, *ST*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 1 a. 1; see Hankey 2007a: 28–34.
45. Hankey 2001: 330.
46. Albert, *Epistula Septima* in *Super Mysticam*, 504, lines 11–39.
47. Albertus Magnus 1978b: 2, 542, lines 24–29.
48. Crouse 1975: 183.
49. Crouse 1975: 183.
50. Libera 2003: 72.
51. Libera 2003: 77.
52. Anzulewicz 2013: 18.
53. Crouse 1975: 184.
54. Crouse 1975: 184.
55. Anzulewicz 2013: 25.
56. Anzulewicz et al. 2013, 555.
57. Blankenhorn 2015: 42 and 34.
58. Harrington 2017: at 111.
59. Harrington 2017: 115–116.
60. Harrington 2017: 116 quoting Albert, *Super DDN*, I, 6, lines 46–50.
61. Harrington 2017: 117 quoting Aquinas 1950 [herein *In De divinis nominibus* or *In DDN*], I, i, §11.
62. Oliva 2009: 39–58.
63. Booth 1983: 156–204, especially, 161, 166, 182.
64. E.g. Bonin 2001: 45.
65. Albert, *De Causis*, I, 1, cap. 6, 13, lines 69–71; see Hankey 2007b: 316.
66. Albert, *De Causis*, I, 1, cap. 10, 22, line 3; I, 4, cap. 8, 55, lines 76–79.
67. Albert, *De Causis*, I, 1, cap. 10, 22, lines 4–12. See Bonin, *Creation*, 13, 37, 76.
68. Albert, *De Causis*, II, 3, cap. 15, 152, lines 5–6.
69. Bonin 2001: 76.
70. Aquinas, *In DDN*, IV, 1, textus Dionysii, §96. PG 3, 693B.
71. Aquinas, 4, 1, §271.
72. Albert, *Super DDN*, 4, 118, lines 12–25.
73. Bonin 2001: 1.
74. *Registrum epistolarum fratris Ioannis Peckham* in Boureau 1999: 7–9.
75. Blankenhorn 2015: 221.
76. Peckham to the Bishop of Lincoln, *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* denifle 1889: §523.
77. Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, 2 d. 10 q. 1 a. 2 co.
78. Booth 1983: 220–221.
79. See, for example, Albert, *Super DDN*, 2, 67, line 19–69, line 15; 4, 125, lines 6–20; 4, 144, line 10–155, line 72; especially 4, 148, line 45–149, line 27; 4, 280, line 67–281, line 54; 9, 392, line 20–393, line 76; 13, 440, line 15–441, line 63.
80. Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, 2 d. 14 q. 1 a. 2 co.
81. See Appendices 1 and 4 of Hankey 2016: 204–206, ‘Albert uniting the *Liber de causis*, Aristotle, and Dionysius in his Dionysian Commentaries. A selection of texts’ and ‘Aquinas and Albert texts attributing the *Liber de causis* to Aristotle or the Philosopher.’

82. Blankenhorn 2015: 124.
83. Blankenhorn 2015: 125.
84. Albertus Magnus 1993b: [herein *Super De caelesti*], 6, 84, lines 28–32 translated by Blankenhorn. For Aquinas, see Appendix 3 of Hankey 2016: 205, ‘Aquinas on Divine Revelation according to our mode of knowing’.
85. See Appendix 2 of Hankey 2016: 205, ‘*Caelestial Hierarchy*: ‘quod impossibile est nobis aliter lucere divinum radium, nisi varietate sacrorum velaminum circumvelatum’ in Aquinas’.
86. For example, Aquinas *Super Sent.*, 4 d. 49 q. 2 a. 6 ad 3. See Appendix 5 of Hankey 2016: 206, ‘Aristotle the Negative Theologian: the ‘*oculus noctuae*’ and the ‘*oculus vespertilionis*’ for more.
87. Albert, *Super Mysticam*, 2, 466, lines 52–58.
88. Albert, 2, 467, lines 3–11, Blankenhorn’s translation.
89. Simplicius 1971: xi.
90. Steel 1989: 62–65 and 73–75; Steel 2014: 255.
91. Aquinas, *ST*, pr.
92. Aquinas, *ST*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 1 a. 1 ad 2. Aquinas, *In DDN*, I, i, §13.
93. Blankenhorn 2015: 323.
94. Aquinas, *ST*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 1 a. 1 co.
95. Aquinas, *In DDN*, XIII, iii, § 986.
96. Albert, *Super DDN*, 1, 2, lines 37–48 (Blankenhorn’s translation).
97. Aquinas, *ST*, I<sup>a</sup>, q. 14, pr.
98. Aquinas, *In DDN*, II, ii, §143. See also, II, ii, §135.
99. Aquinas, *In DDN*, XIII, iii, §989; XIII, ii, §980; XIII, iii, § 986. Hankey 2017: 147, 151–154.
100. See Aquinas, *In DDN*, I, i, §§ 1–3; II, i, § 110, §121, §§126–127; II, ii, §141–142. Hankey 1981: 371; Emery 2007: 46–47; Blankenhorn 2015: 322.
101. Aquinas, *ST*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 75 pr.; Aquinas, *De Substantiis*, cap. 20, D79, lines 304–310.
102. See Hankey 1987/2000: 3–12; Hankey 2002b: 319.
103. Aquinas, *ST*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 1 a. 1 co & ad 2 and I<sup>a</sup> q. 1 a. 8 ad 2.
104. Schenk 2005: 311–320. R.
105. Albert, *Super DDN*, 11, 424, line 80–425, line 36; Blankenhorn 2015: 326, n22.
106. Albert, 11, 423, lines 69–72.
107. Albert, 11, 424, line 83–425, line 30.
108. See Hankey, ‘The Concord’: 164–189.
109. Aquinas, *In DDN*, pr.
110. Aquinas, XIII, iii, §§ 993–994.
111. Aquinas, IV, ii, §§ 295–298, and Appendix 7, Hankey 2016: 209, ‘Aquinas on Plato and the Platonici on Non-being, Privation, Matter and Evil’.
112. Aquinas, *In DDN*, pr.
113. Aquinas, V, i, § 634.
114. Aquinas, IV, i, § 261.
115. Aquinas, IV, i, § 269.
116. Aquinas, IV, i, § 276.
117. Aquinas, *SDC*, prop. 3, 18, lines 8–23.
118. Aquinas, prop. 3, 20, lines 5–11.
119. Aquinas, *In DDN*, V, i, § 613.
120. Aquinas, XI, iv, §§ 933–934.

121. Aquinas, V, iii, §665.
122. Aquinas, V, iii, §664.
123. Aquinas, *De Substantiis*, cap. 4, D 47, lines 15–19.
124. E.g. Aquinas, *SDC*, prop. 3, 24, lines 4–12 and prop. 13, 83, lines 8–17.
125. Aquinas, prop. 10, 67, line 19–68, line 16.
126. Booth 1983: 205.
127. Booth, 215.
128. Booth, 218; te Velde 1995: 257–265 has Dionysius play the same role for Aquinas. See Hankey 1998: 171–172.
129. Blankenhorn 2015: 124, 222–223.
130. Porro 2016: 253.
131. Blankenhorn 2015: 101–110.
132. Albertus Magnus 1993c: 95, lines 21–23.
133. Albertus Magnus, 95, lines 43–44.
134. Albertus Magnus, 98, lines 32–35.
135. Blankenhorn 2015: 102.
136. See Albert, *Quaestiones*, 95, lines 55–61.
137. For details, see Hankey 2016: 177–183 and 207–208: Appendix 6 ‘Albert and Aquinas in their commentaries *On the Divine Names* on knowledge of *quia est* and *quid est* in respect to God’.
138. Aquinas 1964: II, i, §282.
139. Aquinas 1992: 6.4 *corpus*, 170, lines 112–113; idem, *Expositio Posteriorum*, I, ii, 11, lines 35–6; idem, *In DDN*, I, ii, §51.
140. Aquinas, *SDC*, prop. 6, p. 44.
141. Aquinas, prop. 6, 47, lines 8–22. Aquinas, *In DDN*, XIII, 3, §§ 993–994.
142. Aquinas, *In DDN*, XIII, 3, §996.
143. Aquinas, *In Metaphysicorum*, II, i, §285.
144. Peckham to the Bishop of Lincoln, §523.
145. Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, 1 d. 8 q. 1 a. 1 ad 4. See Blankenhorn 2015: 358.
146. Aquinas 1953, cap. 6, 3. See Blankenhorn 2015: 372–373.

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## CHAPTER 27

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# DIONYSIUS IN DANTE

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MARK EDWARDS

SOME find the style of Dionysius turgid; others think him a genius who presses the limits of speech to arrive at that which no speech can limit. In matter if not in manner he lays before us the stuff of poetry, and it was therefore our good fortune as well as his that he had not yet lost his ecclesiastical standing when Dante Alighieri was driven out of his native Florence in 1302 and took up residence in Verona under the patronage of Cangrande della Scala.<sup>1</sup> In this period of enforced leisure the greatest of Italian poets composed first his *Convivio*, a commentary on a series of amatory verses which succeeded and sublimated his unrequited addresses to his first love Beatrice, and then his religious masterpiece, the *Divine Comedy*, in which he is escorted through the underworld by Virgil, up Mount Purgatory by Statius, and finally through the spheres of heaven by the sainted Beatrice. The transfiguration of the perceptible by allegory, giving rise to a transfiguration of love within the soul, is the theme of both works, and the fourfold practice of reading which is expounded in Dante's letter to Cangrande<sup>2</sup> has its roots in Origen, mentor to Dionysius (and to all Christians) in the exegesis of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> In the present essay it will be argued that, although he is seldom named in them, both of these works are leavened by Dionysian images, and that the vivid and concrete metaphors which mark the progress of Dante's understanding in the *Comedy* are at once a dramatization of and a commentary on the Areopagite's precepts for the elevation of the mind to God.

Before we turn to his works we must add the caveat that Dante may not have known any Dionysian text at first hand other than the *Celestial Hierarchy*, which of course he could not read in the original Greek.<sup>4</sup> Neglected though it is today, the *Celestial Hierarchy* was the subject for commentaries by John Sarracenus and Hugh of St Victor before a commentary was produced for any of its companions. Thomas Gallus, another Victorine, had made the nine orders of angels the foundation for a mystical itinerary, in which the guide for the first stages is reason, for the next three reason and love, and for the last three love alone.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, if Dante knew the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, he made no use of it in his political writings: indeed it would have been of little service in contesting the encroachments of the papacy on the temporal privileges of the emperor. The imagery and teaching of the *Divine Names* are ubiquitous, as we shall see, in the

*Paradiso*, but it is posable that they came to Dante only by way of Aquinas. The question is of no great moment, for influence is influence, however mediated, and it is common experience, even when we know that we have read a book, to be uncertain whether some particular phrase is known to us because we have read it there or because it has been made famous by subsequent quotation.

## ANGELIC CONTEMPLATION IN THE *CONVIVIO*

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In his *Convivio* or *Banquet*, Dante elucidates a number of his own poems which were intended (as he now maintains) to be read in both a literal and in an allegorical sense. Commencing with the literal sense of a poem which apostrophizes those ‘who move the third heaven by intellection’<sup>6</sup> as companions to his dead and exalted Beatrice (*Convivio* 2.2), he explains that according to Ptolemy the astronomer, the number of mobile heavens is not eight (as Aristotle thought) but nine, while beyond all these is the sphere of God the unmoved mover, which is also the abode of the saints when they quit the present world (*Convivio* 2.4). The mobile spheres, from nearest to furthest, are those of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the Empyrean. The sphere which represents Beatrice therefore—always with the caveat that she herself is with God—is that of Venus, the patron of love. The angels are invoked because every heaven is impelled by a pure intelligence, so that in all there are nine orders of these, which are ranked in three ascending triads to mirror the triune Godhead (*Convivio* 2.5). The seraphim, the cherubim, and the thrones, who move the three highest spheres, are engaged in the perpetual contemplation of the Father, the seraphim in relation to himself, the cherubim in relation to the Son and the thrones in relation to the Holy Spirit. The angels of the next triad in descending order are the dominions, the virtues, and the powers, all engaged in the contemplation of the Son, first in relation to the Father, then in relation to himself, then in relation to the Spirit. In the third triad, the angels of the third heaven are the principdoms, contemplating the Spirit in relation to the Father, while Mercury and the moon are governed respectively by the archangels and the angels, the first contemplating the Spirit in relation to the Son, the second in relation to himself.

The only Dionysius to whom Dante refers in this treatise is the putative teacher of Plato, Dionysius the Academician, who is one of his authorities for equating each of the planetary revolutions with a science on the grounds that each science revolves around its subject, dispenses illumination, and brings to perfection that over which it presides (*Convivio* 2.13).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless it is clear that he is indebted to the Areopagite, not only for the ranking of the angels but for the argument that if the higher intelligences are hidden from us, it is not for want of light but because our vision is dimmed by the weakness of the soul. When the poem is read allegorically, the love that Dante seeks in the third sphere signifies the rapture of the mind by philosophy from its bondage to earth (*Convivio* 2.15). As in Dionysius, the divine rays kindle the intellect by firing the soul with love. This is the theme that he at last found the power to address in verse in

the *Divine Comedy*, the peroration to which is already foreshadowed in the *Convivio*. At *Paradiso* 32.137 we learn that Lucy, patron of the blind and handmaid to Mary, is the saint who sent down Beatrice to act as psychopomp to Dante; in the earlier text two antipodal cities, Maria and Lucia, are invented to illustrate the consequences of the sun's motion round the earth (3.5).<sup>8</sup>

## THE PARADISO: GAZING ON THE SUN

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An index to the *Divine Comedy* will reveal at most two references to the Areopagite. I say 'at most' because in the first (*Comedy* 10.115) he is introduced by circumlocution as that candle who in the flesh saw furthest into the nature of angels; in the second (28.130) he is named by Beatrice, who endorses his account of the order and ministry of angels, thus correcting the error of Gregory the Great. As in the *Convivio*, so in the *Comedy*, Dionysius is remembered above all as the exponent of the celestial hierarchy. To Aquinas, by contrast, he had been more than this—above all else, the philosopher who had given an all but apostolic sanction to the Neoplatonic and Augustinian principle that that which is, insofar as it is necessarily good, so that evil must always be a deficit of being and can never have any substance of its own. We of course reverse the chronology and assume, in contrast to both Aquinas and Dante, that it was Dionysius who followed the Neoplatonists in likening the Good to an inextinguishable sun and evil to the shadows which result from the interception or obfuscation of its rays. For Christians this simile is authorized by the dictum of St John that God is light (1 John 1.5; cf John 8.12), and Dante commences the third part of the *Comedy*, not with a parabolic wakening in a wood (as in the *inferno*) or with a metaphorical putting out to sea (as in the *Purgatorio*), but with a salutation of God's dawning glory:<sup>9</sup>

La gloria di colui che tutto move  
per l'universo penetre e risplende  
in una parte più e meno altrove

(The glory of him who moves all things penetrates the universe, and shines in one part more and in another less.)

Why the sun's beams fall so unequally Dante has yet to learn, but at least his eyes are no longer sealed as at the beginning of the poem. The wood of the *inferno* is a symbol not only of ignorance but of the *hulè* or *silva*, the tenebrous matter of the text, on which the intellect must impose semantic clarity by applying all the four methods of exegesis described by Dante in the *Convivio* and in his letter to Cangrande. The water of the *Purgatorio* symbolizes the exodus from sin, the initiation into new life, the purification of the soul, the ascent from a grosser to a more translucent medium of understanding—in short the way of purgation as this was defined in a mystical taxonomy which derived from the *Celestial Hierarchy*. With the emergence into light at the summit of Mount

Purgatory, the poet sets his feet upon the way of illumination, and the reader acquires a clearer understanding of the regions through which he has already passed as he comes to perceive that Hell and Purgatory exist only for the sake of Heaven, just as Virgil and Statius can mean nothing to us but as harbingers of a world that neither has seen. There is, of course, no light for the blind, and Dante is still so far from a full awakening that his own eyes will not sustain the celestial rays:<sup>10</sup>

quando Beatrice in sul sinistro fianco  
vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole ....  
così del'atto suo, per l'occhi infuse  
per l' imagine mia, lo mio si fece  
et fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr' uso

(when I saw Beatrice turned round to the left and looking on the sun .... So from her action, infused by the eyes into my imagination, mine was made, and beyond our wont I fixed my eyes on the sun.)

The argument that we cannot hope to see God so long as our naked eyes cannot even bear the sun is as old as Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 4.3.14), who is imitated by Barnabas, Minucius Felix, Eusebius, and many other Fathers of the Church.<sup>11</sup> Dionysius, however, may be the only precursor of Dante who foreshadows his application of the conceit, not directly to God, but to a human mediator of otherwise unattainable knowledge:<sup>12</sup>

Hierotheus so excelled the majority of sacred teachers, in expense of time, in purity of intellect and in the clarity of his demonstrations, and in all other elements of sacred discourse, that we could never have ventured to look directly on such a sun.

We shall soon have occasion to quote the following chapter from Dionysius (*Divine Names* 4.10, in which we learn that the light that glowed in Hierotheus emanated from a higher Sun. As in the *Paradiso*, so in the *Divine Names* of Dionysius, it is an axiom that truth can be communicated only in proportion to the capacity of the recipient. It is on this premise that the Areopagite, while insisting as strongly as Dante that we must speak of the divine through the symbols given to us by common speech, insists with equal vehemence that they are not to be understood in the common manner. In the fourth Canto Dante learns that all the saints have their home in the Empyrean, and that if they appear to him in the orbits of successive planets, this is only by way of accommodation to his imperfect powers of comprehension. Beatrice draws an analogy with the anthropomorphic imagery of the Scriptures, which the reader of Dante should also take as a warning against rash judgements on the inchoate theology of these early cantos:<sup>13</sup>

Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno,  
però che solo da sensate apprende  
ciò che fa poscia d'intelletto degno.

(It is necessary to speak thus to your faculty, since only from sense perception does it grasp that which it then makes fit for the intellect.)

It is fitting that Dionysius himself should appear in the circle of the sun, and that the saint who points him out should be his disciple and Dante's master Thomas Aquinas. There was some dispute even in the fourteenth century as to the provenance of the works attributed to him, but the poet makes his position clear by assigning to him the first place in the procession of scholars, ordered by chronology, who succeed the five great doctors of faith and law:<sup>14</sup>

Appresso vedi il lume di quel cero  
che giù in carne, più a dentro vide  
l'angelica natura e 'l ministero.

(Beside it see the light of that candle which below in the flesh saw furthest into the nature and ministry of the angels.)

## THE *PARADISO*: MYSTERIES OF PREDESTINATION AND ANGELIC KNOWLEDGE

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As Dante ascends through the spheres, he suffers the usual corollary of a rapid education, which is to thirst for more understanding than he can bear. Dionysius had been much exercised by the mystery of providence, but in the wake of Augustine the scholastics had wandered into the still thornier question of predestination. Dante first seeks an answer to it in Canto 8 (112–148), where he also quotes the exordium to his canzone in the *Convivio*, 'You who move the third heaven by intellection' (*Convivio* 8.37). Here he is told that operations of nature require her to mould a diversity of creatures; in Canto 13 he learns that they differ in their receptiveness to God's bounty as one wax surface differs in malleability from another:<sup>15</sup>

La cera di costoro, e chi la duce,  
non sta d'uno modo, e per ò sotto il segno  
ideale pui piu e men traduce.

(The wax of these things and that which moulds it are not always in the same state; and therefore beneath the stamp of the idea the light then shines through more or less.)

The simile may be commonplace, but as Gardner observes, the likeness to Dionysius is striking:<sup>16</sup>

Someone might say that the seal is not whole and the same for every mould. It is not the seal, however, that is the cause of this, for it gives itself whole and just the same to each, but the difference in the recipients causes the impressions of this whole and single archetype to be unlike.

In Canto 19 Dante's questions become more stubborn and is warned by Peter Damian that if the 'first proud spirit' who tried to fathom it fell for want of light, no inferior can hope to contain the plenitude of divine wisdom (19.46–51). A Dionysian simile assures him that, whatever may be hidden from us, we know that from the source of light there can issue nothing but light:<sup>17</sup>

Dunque nostra veduta, che convene  
essere alcun de' raggi della mente  
di che tutte le cose son ripiene,  
non pò da sua natura esser potente  
tanto, che suo principio non discerna  
molto di là da quel che l'è parvente.

(Thus our vision, which must needs be one of the rays of the Mind of which all things are full, cannot by its nature be of such power that it should not perceive its origin to be far beyond all that appears to it.)

Thus all evil, or rather our perception of it, arises from the creature's incapacity to receive all the good that flows from the Creator. Another image, at once Dionysian and Aristotelian (and therefore doubly Thomistic<sup>18</sup>) explains that the measure of goodness in the creature is its closeness to the unmoved source of light:<sup>19</sup>

La prima volontà, ch' è da sè bona,  
da sè, ch' è summo ben, mai non si mosse.

Cotanta è giusto quanto a lei consona:  
nullo creato bene a sè la tira,  
ma essa, radiando, lui cagiona.

(The Primal Will, which in itself is good, from itself, the supreme Good, never was moved; whatever accords with it is in that measure just; no created good draws it from itself, but it, raying forth, creates that good.)

Canto 20 is an arcane meditation on the imponderable working of the divine will, one of whose acts was to save the most virtuous of the Trojans to whom the Romans traced their ancestry (20.68–69), while another was to bring Trajan from the nether world in response to the prayers of Gregory the Great.<sup>20</sup> In Canto 21 Peter Damian testifies that neither he nor the foremost seraph in heaven, though they gaze directly upon the essence of God, can see to the bottom of the abyss that the poet has threatened to open:<sup>21</sup>

Ma quell' alma nel ciel che più si schiara,  
quell' serafin che 'n Dio più l'occhio ha fisso,  
alla dimanda tua non satisfara;  
Però che sì s'innoltra nello abisso  
dell' eterno statuto quel che chiedi,  
que da ogni creata vista è scisso.



(But that soul in heaven that is most illumined, the seraph whose eye is most fixed on God, will not satisfy thy question; for that which thou askest is so far removed in the abyss of the Eternal Ordinance that it is cut off from every created vision.)

The ascent to the higher spheres is possible only when Dante resigns his understanding to the Scriptures, and it is in the twenty-eighth circle that he receives not so much the answer to his question as the vision that reveals to him, as it had once revealed to Aquinas, the futility of every creature's question to its Creator:<sup>22</sup>

Un punto vidi che raggiava lume  
acuto sì, che 'l viso ch'elli affoca  
chiuder conviensi per to forte acume.

(I saw a point that radiated a light so keen that the eye on which it burns must close of its piercing power.)

Beatrice informs her lover that this is the point from which all the heavens and all nature are suspended (28.41–2). As Molly Morrison notes,<sup>23</sup> this figure too has its origin in Dionysius:

Now this is common and of a piece and one for the entire Godhead, to be participated wholly and in its entirety by all participants, and yet again by none in any part, just as the point in the centre of a circle is participated by all the straight lines that all the radii that lie around it in the circle.

Dante now seeks a rationale for the order of the universe, and Beatrice explains that the ampler spheres are those that contain the greater measure of blessedness and virtue, and that the outermost sphere is that in which love and knowledge are present in greatest measure (28.64–71). The coalescence of knowledge and love was a common theme of the mystical itineraries which the Victorines had modelled on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius, and Beatrice proceeds to enumerate the three triads of heavenly ministers: first the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones, next the dominions, virtues, and powers, and finally the principedoms, archangels, and angels (28.98–129). This, she concludes, is the true economy, as Dionysius knew and as Gregory learned when he entered heaven, with a saint's good humour at finding himself in the wrong.<sup>24</sup>

E Dionisio con tanto disio  
a contemplar questi ordini si mise  
che li nomò e distinse com'io.  
Ma Gregorio da lui poi si divise;  
onde, sì tosto come li occhi aperse  
in questo ciel, di sì medesimo rise.

(And Dionysius set himself with such zeal to contemplate their orders that he named and distributed them as I do; but later Gregory differed from him, so that as soon as he opened his eyes in this heaven he smiled at himself.)

Why is Dante so certain that Dionysius is to be preferred to Gregory?<sup>25</sup> No doubt because superior authority had already been accorded to him, at least tacitly, by Aquinas. In the questions of the *Summa Theologiae* that concern the angels, Dionysius frequently supplies the text that counters the preliminary objections to a thesis, even when they are advanced in the name of a Gregory or an Augustine (*pars prima*, q. 50, art. 2; q. 50, art. 5; q. 51, art. 1; q. 54, art. 2; q. 55, art. 1, 2 and 3; q. 64, art. 1). While this predilection is not invariable (q. 56, art. 1), it is only Dionysius who gives Aquinas a charter for speaking of higher and lower degrees among angels (q. 55, art. 3). The orders are not delineated except at q. 63, art. 7, where the hypothesis that Satan was the first among the angels is refuted by the assertion that the name 'seraph' connotes intensity of love, whereas the name 'cherub' connotes only plenitude of knowledge. In his commentaries on Paul, however, Aquinas has to choose between the ranking of the angels in Colossians, where principdoms stand between thrones and domination, and that of Ephesians, where they stand between powers and archangels. The first order was followed by Gregory, the second by Dionysius; without expressly declaring him to be wrong, Aquinas takes scant notice of angels in Colossians but expatiates on the Dionysian order in Ephesians, assigning to the first triad a direct vision of the mystery of the Godhead, to the second the administration of nature in accordance with the mystery, and to third the task of special interposition in mundane and human affairs.<sup>26</sup>

## THE NON-DIONYSIAN DANTE

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Gregory's fallibility is a symptom of the diversity among creatures, which is reaffirmed in Canto 31:<sup>27</sup>

Chè la luce divina è penetrante  
per l' universe, secondo ch' è degno,  
sì che nulla le puote essere substance.

(For the divine light penetrates the universe according to the fitness of its parts so that nothing can hinder it.)

Or as Dionysius has it:<sup>28</sup>

Just as the sun in our world, without deliberation or choice but by his mere being, illuminates all that is able to receive illumination by its own measure, thus the Good also, superior to the sun as the sublime archetype to its dim copy, likewise dispenses the rays of its entire goodness, by its mere existence, to everything that is.

In one respect, we might say, Dante elects not to follow Dionysius, for it would seem that in his symbolism God is always light and therefore darkness signifies only the remoteness of the creature from its Creator. In Dionysius the light that is God is also a dazzling

darkness, the Presence at the summit of Mount Sinai is a cloud that occluded as much as it reveals or rather reveals it by occlusion, and the cataphatic imagery of the Bible has its inseparable counterpoint in the apophatic diction of the philosophers who tell us that we know God best when we make least profession of knowledge. Aquinas also, notwithstanding his doctrines of supereminence and analogy (which are also Dionysian), does not fail to add the caveat that a perfect knowledge of God is precluded not only by our infirmity but by his essence. He is not so ready as Dionysius, however, to affirm that God is darkness; as for Dante, he mounts from one refulgent sphere to another, growing continually in his capacity to sustain the heavenly vision, until at last he is able to behold with steadfast gaze the glory which in the first Canto could be revealed to him only through the eyes of his beloved:<sup>29</sup>

Io credo, per l'acume ch'io suffersi  
del vivo raggio, ch' I' sarei smarrito  
se li occhi mei da lui fossero aversi.  
E mi ricorda ch' io fu più ardito  
per questo a sostener, tanto ch' I' giunsi  
l' aspetto mio col valore infinito.

(I think, from the keenness I endured of the living ray, that I should have been dazzled if my eyes had been turned from it; and I remember that for this cause I was the bolder to sustain it until I reached with my gaze the infinite Goodness.)

True, we are told that after this both words and phantasy fail him, but we are not told that his intellectual vision fails him even when his desire and will are caught up into the love that whirls the sun and other stars.<sup>30</sup> Dante's indifference to the higher symbolism of darkness seems to have prompted an oblique criticism of Dionysius in Canto 29, where Beatrice mocks the idle disputes between friars as to whether the eclipse at the time of Christ's death had been witnessed only in Israel or in all regions of the globe (29.94–102, pp. 420–421 Sinclair). On this Dionysius has a clear opinion: the sun was obscured throughout the world, as befits the death of him who is the sun of faith, yet better known to the intellect in darkness than in light.<sup>31</sup> For Dante there can be no eclipse of reason. According to the *Convivio*, he transferred his love of Beatrice to philosophy; according to the *Comedy*, he never let go of philosophy even when he had reached the highest circle of transfigured love.

## NOTES

1. For general studies of Dante's mysticism see Colombo (1987) and Carugati (1991).
2. That is, Letter 13 if genuine: see further Ascoli (2010). Franke (2010) observes that Dionysius is quoted in Letter 13.60, and also at Letter 11.16, a salvo against the avarice of the clergy, addressed to the cardinals.
3. See De Lubac (1998), 290. On Origen's hermeneutics as the model for the threefold way of purgation, illumination, and perfection (first attested in the *Celestial Hierarchy*) see Louth (1983), 82 and 172–173.

4. On the commentaries and texts available to him see Prandi (2009), 9–11. On the Dionysian origins of Dante's angelology see Sbacchi (2006).
5. See chapters on Sarracenus and the Victorines in this volume.
6. Voi che 'intendendo il terzio ciel movete'. Cf. 2 Corinthians 12.2.
7. On the latent presence of this conceit in the *Paradiso* see Durling (2011), 754–757.
8. See further Durling (2011), 656.
9. *Paradiso* I.1–3; text and translation from Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, trans. and ed. J. D. Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford university Press), 18–19.
10. *Paradiso* 1.46–47 and 52–54, pp. 2021 Sinclair. On the epistemological reservations implied by words denoting imagination and fantasy see Prandi (2009), citing Ariani (2009), 25ff.
11. *Epistle of Barnabas* 4.3.14; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 32; Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 4.6.5. cf. Plato, *Republic* 515e–516a.
12. *Divine Names* 3.3, p. 142 Suchla.
13. *Paradiso* 4.40–42, pp. 62–63 Sinclair.
14. That is Albert, Aquinas, Gratian, Peter Lombard, and Solomon. Text and translation from *Paradiso* 10.115–118, pp. 152–153 Sinclair.
15. *Paradiso* 13.67–69, pp. 192–193 Sinclair.
16. *Divine Names* 2.6, p. 129 Suchla. Cf. Gardner (1913), 101–102.
17. *Paradiso* 19.52.58, pp. 272–273 Sinclair. Sinclair comments on p. 280 that 'our vision, the further it reaches, is the more aware of its limits.'
18. Cf. Prandi (2009), 22.
19. *Paradiso* 19.86–90, pp. 274–275 Sinclair.
20. *Paradiso* 20.43–45 and 106–117, See further Vickers (1983).
21. *Paradiso* 21.91–95, pp. 306–307 Sinclair.
22. *Paradiso* 28.15–17, pp. 402–403 Sinclair.
23. *Divine Names* 2.5, p. 129 Suchla, quoted by Morrison (1998), 88. Cf. Prandi (2009), 15–20.
24. *Paradiso* 28.130–135, pp. 408–409 Sinclair.
25. Louth (1983), 160 observes that Bernard also followed Gregory.
26. Edwards 2005: 159–160
27. *Paradiso* 31.22–24, pp. 446–447 Sinclair.
28. *Divine Names* 4.1, p. 143 Suchla; cf. Gardner (1913), 93.
29. *Paradiso* 33.79–84, pp. 482–483 Sinclair.
30. *Paradiso* 33.145, pp. 484–485 Sinclair; but cf 33.109–111. On the fusion of desire and will see also *Paradiso* 28.70–72.
31. Dionysius, Letters 7.2, p. 168 Heil and Ritter.

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## CHAPTER 28

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# THE CARTHUSIANS AND THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

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PETER TYLER

THIS essay explores the reception of the Dionysian corpus within the climate of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Western culture and its subsequent interpretation in the development of the affective spirituality that will form the basis of the late medieval *theologia mystica*. As such it spans the period between the Victorine interpretations in the Parisian schools of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and anticipates the development of late medieval/early Renaissance affective spirituality in the West. To this end the essay will concentrate on the reception and subsequent interpretation of the corpus in two key sets of texts: the anonymous work of the English author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and that of the Carthusian writer, Hugh of Balma, in particular his *Viae Lugent Sion*.<sup>1</sup> In considering these two sets of texts the aim is to explore the development of what has been termed 'affective Dionysianism' and the chapter will conclude with a short footnote on how this will subsequently feed into the development of early modern affective spirituality. The terrain is, of course, vast, so the essay will consist of a series of reflections on key themes of Dionysian interpretation in the two sets of texts, relating them to earlier interpretations of Dionysius as outlined in previous chapters of this volume while highlighting the significance of such developments for the subsequent future of Western Christian spirituality. However before we embark on this analysis it is fruitful to remind readers of the origins and nature of the texts and the milieu within which the authors were working.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFECTIVE DIONYSIANISM

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As has been explored earlier in this volume, recent scholarship has revealed how the Latin texts of the Dionysian corpus that were to influence the authors under

investigation here had already undergone a great deal of hermeneutical scrutiny in the hands of the Victorines and their Parisian associates.<sup>1</sup> It is clear from these studies that by the late thirteenth century any text of Dionysius would come accompanied by not only varying translations, such as those of Eriugena or Sarracenus, but also with the commentaries and glosses from Hilduin, Anastasius the papal librarian, Hugh of St Victor, Sarracenus, Thomas Gallus, and Eriugena.<sup>2</sup> As Harrington points out, the text thus came with a seven hundred year-old commentary and scholarship attached. As we are concerned here with the growth and understanding of the *theologia mystica* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in a scholarship that largely relied on these Latin texts, we shall not concern ourselves so much with the Greek original but rather the Latin texts available to our authors. As Harrington puts it: 'the thirteenth-century reader came to the text of the *Mystical Theology* [hereafter MT] with much of the interpretative work already done for him, finding difficult metaphors and foreign concepts set within a more familiar Latin framework' (2004: 27). Specifically, in the case of our authors, they would largely rely on the work of the Victorines and Sarracenus who had produced working Latin editions of the corpus with their concomitant glosses. Sarracenus, as we have seen, produced his version of the corpus in 1166–1167, the first full translation since Eriugena, some three hundred years earlier. In contrast to Eriugena, Sarracenus generally tends to smooth out some of the inconsistencies and hard edges in the text to present a more flowing Latin text. In particular, he avoided the strange Greek–Latin hybrid words that Eriugena often produced from his straightforward transliterations of Greek terms. Thus he renders *θεοσοφίας* in MT:1 as *divina sapientia* (lit: *divine wisdom*) rather than Eriugena's *theosophia* (lit: *theosophy*). However, he does retain the *super-*terms introduced by Hilduin and Eriugena. *ὑπέρθεε*, for example, changes gender from *superdeus* to *superdea* in MT: 1, presumably in reference to the holy *sapientia*. We shall refer back to these terms later in the essay.

In addition to Sarracenus, in terms of the transmission to Hugh of Balma and the *Cloud* author, the other key interpretation is that provided by Thomas Gallus (Vercellienis). Drawing mainly on the translation of Sarracenus, Gallus continued the tradition of glosses on the corpus producing glosses on the whole corpus, completed in 1233. Following the glosses as above, Gallus completed an *Extractio* of the whole corpus in 1238. In McEvoy's words:

The *Extractio* constitutes a literary genre all of its own... It was, one might say, just the thing required by the busy university minds of his age, who were eager for doctrinal understanding but were largely untroubled by any kind of philological or antiquarian curiosity (McEvoy 2003: 2).

The result is a curious document<sup>3</sup> that 'translates' the Dionysian corpus into the Latin world of the thirteenth century and would have considerable influence over the next centuries.<sup>4</sup>

In Gallus' work (see especially here Rorem 1993: 214–219 and McGinn 1998) the *af-fective* interpretation of Dionysius begins to surface. Influenced by Augustine (as passed down from Richard and Hugh of St Victor), Gallus also incorporated the influences of



the newly founded Cistercian movement, especially in Bernard's (1090–1153) inspiration found in the Song of Songs.<sup>5</sup> Thus the Parisians and writers such as Gallus, according to McGinn, 'attempt to see the Dionysian writings as the theoretical or speculative side of the practical theology of mystical joining with God described in the Song of Songs' (McGinn 2005: 13), reinterpreting the Dionysian 'mystical ascent to union in terms of the superiority of an experience of affective love beyond cognition'. McGinn and Rorem are here representative of contemporary interpretation that aims to distinguish between 'affective' and 'intellective' Dionysianism in the medieval schools of interpretation, primarily dividing those that arise from the Rhenish interpretations of the Areopagite originating with St Albert the Great and those of the Parisian schools. In making such a distinction McGinn and Rorem do not want to suggest there is no role in the Dionysian ascent for love or *eros* but rather that the new twelfth-century Victorine interpretation will incorporate a more psychological perspective with emphases on aspects of the soul such as Gallus' *apex affectionis/scintilla apicis affectualis* to which we will return later (McGinn 2005: 488, see also Tyler 2011). In reaction, commentators such as Taylor Coolman (in Coakley and Stang 2009) have pointed out that the bifurcation of the tradition into 'intellective' and 'affective' may sometimes miss the gradations of use to which the Dionysian corpus is put to use by the Victorines and other late medieval authors (McGinn himself, in fairness, recognizes this at the end of *The Harvest of Mysticism* in his subtle account of Cusanus' use of the *Dionysian Corpus* in his fifteenth-century interpretation).

Hugh of Balma and the author of the *Cloud* are clearly part of this post-Victorine hermeneutic that attempts to incorporate these 'affective' interpretations into their own reflections on the Dionysian *corpus*, and we shall map here their respective strategies of interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

## VIAE SION LUGENT: ORIGINS AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE TEXT

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The manuscript referred to throughout the late medieval/Renaissance period as the *De Mystica Theologia*, *De Triplici Via*, or *Viae Sion Lugent*<sup>7</sup> and attributed variously to Hugh of Balma/Palma, Hugh of Dorche, Henry of Balma/Dorche and even St Bonaventure has recently received sufficient scholarly attention to enable a critical edition to be produced by Ruello for the *Éditions du Cerf* (Hugh of Balma 1995). A century of scholarly attention has still not resolved the exact identity of the author, however the suggestion made that the French name Hugues de Balma de Dorche is the nearest we can get to the complete name of the author seems the most plausible (see, for example, Dubourg 1927, Stoelen 1969, and Guinan 1994).<sup>8</sup> Hugh was the Prior of the Charterhouse of Meyriat, variously called Meyriac, Majorevi, or Meyriae, subsequently destroyed during the French Revolution. The documents of the Charterhouse, conserved in the archives of Ain, contain numerous manuscripts of Hugh's treatise, many of them carrying his name, it being

remembered that it was common practice (and still is) for Carthusians to present their manuscripts anonymously.

As well as to Hugh, the manuscript has been ascribed to Bonaventure (appearing in collections of Bonaventure's works right up to, but not including, the Quaracchi edition of 1882), a fictional Franciscan 'Henry of Balma', a Carthusian Hugh of Palma, and a Henry of Kalkar, a Carthusian of Cologne who was born in 1328.<sup>9</sup>

As Guigue de Pont's *De Contemplatione* makes reference to the *Viae Sion Lugent*, Ruello (1981) gives the *Viae* a date of composition not later than 29 October 1297—the date of death of Guigue de Pont. References in the text to Albert the Great's *Commentary on the Sentences* (1244–1249), Grosseteste (*d.* 1255), Bonaventure (*d.* 1273), and Thomas Aquinas (*d.* 1272) place the work in the latter half of the thirteenth century. The reference to the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, first popularized in 1272 by Thomas Aquinas, seems to suggest a date after 1272. Ruello therefore suggests a date of composition between 1272 and 1297.

The context of the work hints at a reaction to the scholastic learning, or rather a placing of the 'mystical learning' in the context of 'scholastic learning'. It is therefore ideally situated for an investigation of the evolution of the *theologia mystica* in the late medieval period. Pierre Dubourg's attempt to create a critical edition in the 1930s resulted in a census of seventy-one complete and twenty-one partial manuscripts of the text scattered around Europe and beyond, of which Ruello used fifty-nine to produce his critical text (see Martin 1997: 60, Hugh of Balma 1995: 113).<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of the present essay we shall see how an exposition of Hugh's work reveals how the text adopts the twelfth-century innovations of the Victorines to end up being a key document in establishing later affective interpretations of Dionysius. In this respect the text builds on this tradition developing an experiential understanding of the role of the *affectus* in the search for God as it delineates the spheres of the *affectus* and the *intellectus* on the path to union with the Divine.<sup>11</sup>

## THE CLOUD CORPUS

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As with the *Viae Lugent Sion*, so with the *Cloud of Unknowing* and its associate works, academic dispute continues as to the nature of authorship. The corpus as such consists of four letters and treatises on the contemplative life:

*The Cloud of Unknowing* itself (hereafter C);  
*The Book of Privy Counselling* (Hereafter BPC);  
*A Pistle of Preier*; and  
*A Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings*.

As well as these four original texts there are three translations or adaptations of works by other authors:

*A Treatise of Discreyson of Spirites*—A translation of St Bernard's *Sermones de Diversis*;

*Deonise Hid Divinite* (hereafter DHD)—a translation of Book One of Dionysius' *Theologia Mystica* from Sarracenus' version with some of Gallus' *Extractio*; and

*A Treatyse of the Stodye of Wysdom that Men Clepen Beniamyn*—a translation of Richard of St Victor's *Benjamin Major*.<sup>12</sup>

Dispute also continues as to how far all seven pieces can be ascribed to the same author. Phyllis Hodgson, in her definitive editions of the works, essays all the possible candidates for authorship ranging from Walter Hilton (attributed by, amongst others, James Greenhalgh, fifteenth-century monk of the Sheen Charterhouse and author of one of the earliest commentaries on the *Cloud* still extant); a secular priest (advocated by Dom Justin McCann OSB in his commentary); a cloistered monk but not a Carthusian (Evelyn Underhill in her commentary), and either a solitary or anchorite (Hodgson and Helen Gardner). James Walsh SJ in his commentary for his *Classics of Western Spirituality* edition favours the attribution of the four principal works to a Carthusian. He is able to make a good case for this attribution based on the internal evidence of the text. Walsh also emphasizes throughout the connecting links between the *Cloud* corpus and the writings of Hugh of Balma (although sadly not always giving full references for these). The fact that the *Cloud* manuscripts circulated so widely amongst the British and continental Carthusian houses suggests, if nothing else, a certain acceptance amongst the Carthusians that they were working with the text of a kindred spirit whose version of late medieval Dionysianism clearly appealed to their cloistered life.<sup>13</sup>

## KEY THEMES IN THE DIONYSIAN INTERPRETATION OF HUGH OF BALMA AND THE AUTHOR OF THE *CLOUD*

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For the purposes of the present essay we shall concentrate primarily on the texts of the *Cloud* itself, the translation of Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* as *Deonise Hid Divinitie* and the *Book of Privy Counselling* as best illustrative of the *Cloud* author's work in assimilating Dionysius into his own distinctive late medieval spirituality. What follows is a discussion of key themes in the Dionysian interpretation of Hugh of Balma and the author of the *Cloud* of Unknowing.

### Hiddenness and Hierarchy: the Esoteric and the Exoteric

Dionysius begins the *Divine Names* by stating that what he is about to set down, must, by necessity, transcend the 'realm of discourse or of intellect' (DN: 1.1). The 'hidden

divinity' cannot be set down by means of 'words or conceptions'. He talks of a 'divine enlightenment' 'into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers'. Like the pre-Christian Dionysian rites, this is a secret initiation that must be hidden from scorn and derision of the uninitiate: 'if the profane were to see or listen to these rites of ours I think they would laugh heartily and pity us for our misguidedness' (EH: 73.1):

which to the man in the street appear quite extraordinary [*multis monstruosas* (E), *prodigiales locutiones* (S)]. Among uninstructed souls the fathers of unspeakable wisdom [*secretae sapientiae patres* (S)] give an impression of outstanding absurdity when, with secret and daring riddles [S: *per quaedam occulta quidem et praesumpta aenigmata*], they make known that truth which is divine, mysterious, and, so far as the profane are concerned, inaccessible [S: *manifestant divinam et mysticam et inviam immundis veritatem*] (Ep: 9.1).

In the *Divine Names* Dionysius exhorts Timothy, his addressee, to 'guard these things in accordance with divine command and you must never speak nor divulge divine things to the uninitiated' (DN: 1.8), for he should 'let such things be kept away from the mockery and the laughter of the uninitiated [S: *et ipsa ab indoctorum risibus et delusionibus auferentes*']'. In similar vein, the *Cloud* author urges the one under instruction:

Neither thou rede it, ne write it, ne speke it, ne yit suffre it be red, wretyn, or spokyn, of any or to any, bot yif it be of soche one or tosoche one that hath (bi thi supposing) in a trewe wille and by an holerentent, purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste (Prologue, Hodgson 1982: 1).<sup>14</sup>

For only those souls who have reached 'the sovereynest pointe of contemplatif leving' can appreciate what will be written here. Reflecting the passage from the *Mystical Theology* which is translated by the *Cloud* author as 'beware that none of thees vnwise men yit wonying in here wittys here thees thinges',<sup>15</sup> the *Cloud* author not only transcribes Sarracenus, but he interjects his own words to underline the esoteric nature of the revelation being given (repeated also in the Epilogue to the text): 'Thees men I clepe alle thoo that ben fastnyd in knowing and in louyng of thees things that ben knowable and han begynnynng, the whiche han opinion that nothing is souereyn-substancyaly abouen thees forseide beyng thinges' (Hodgson 1958: 3.20–23).<sup>16</sup> Whereas Dionysius himself only urges caution against those 'caught up with the things of the world' unable to comprehend anything above 'instances of individual being' and rely solely on their own intellectual resources, the *Cloud* author goes further in castigating those who 'love the things of the world', 'living within their bodily senses which they have in common with the beasts' (Walsh 1988: 75–76). Here the *Cloud* is close to the similar sentiments in Gallus' commentary who condemns 'simple yokels and idolators who have scarcely more than sense-knowledge' (Walsh 1988: 90). In the *Cloud* these 'yokels' are classed as 'fleschely janglers, opyn preisers and blamers of hemself or of any other, tithing tellers, rouners and tutilers of tales, and alle maner of pinchers' (Prologue, Hodgson 1982: 2).<sup>17</sup> To this group of reprobates are added 'corious lettred or lewed men'.

So the Dionysian prohibitions are now extended to include not just the unlettered tittle-tattlers and rude mechanicals but also learned and clergy who are puffed up with their own knowing.

Similarly Hugh's Commentary on the *Mystical Theology, Viae Lugen Sion*, Paragraphs 82–181 begins by stating that the teaching of the Areopagite is a hidden one (*occulto*) and that its anagogical knowledge was handed down from Paul to Dionysius, and hence presumably, through reading this text, to us. Exhorting, as in the *Cloud* that the reader should 'see to it too that no untutored person learns these things' (*De Mystica Theologia* of Dionysius Ch. 1.1–2). Our texts thus have a specific esoteric function, reflecting as they do the 'hidden' or 'mystical' nature of Dionysius' own texts. Within this hidden tradition the secret teaching will thus be passed by a special initiation to which we turn next.

## The Nature of the Initiation

As this author has argued elsewhere (Tyler 2011), following his teacher Hierotheus, Dionysius also engages in a method of what might be termed 'indirect transmission' to convey his teachings. Dionysius' texts, like those of his late medieval interpreters, can be called *performative* rather than *informative*. As has been discussed elsewhere in this volume, in the *Divine Names* Dionysius makes reference to his teacher Hierotheus who is for him a 'surpassing genius' whose work 'is like a kind of second sacred scripture which discloses itself immediately to those who are divinely inspired'. His 'vision, self-witnessed, of the spiritual revelations' and his 'synoptic manner of teaching' presupposes a spiritual power that stands (*presbytikē*) closer to God' (DN: 3.2). Thus, the 'object' of the discourse, that is, our engagement with the material can only be 'grasped' by a 'circling movement' where we are 'mutually implicated' in the method (cf. Ep: 8):

Whatever he learned directly from the sacred writers, whatever his own perspicacious and laborious research of the scriptures uncovered for him, or whatever was made known to him through that most mysterious inspiration, not only learning but also experiencing the divine things (S: *non solum discens sed et patiens divina*, E: *non solum discens sed et affectus divina*, P: *verum etiam iis animo affectus et permotus*, Gk: ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα]. For he had 'sympathy' [S: *compassione*, E: *coaffectione*, Gk: συμπαθείας] with such matters, if I may express it that way, and he was perfected in a mysterious union with them and in a faith in them which was independent of any education (DN: 2.9).

This is the 'indirect initiation' of Hierotheus, reflecting the *myesthai* of the classical initiation into the Dionysian cult (see also DN: 1.8, 3.1, 3.2; CH: 2.5 and 1.5 where the whole of Christianity is described as a mystery religion). Dionysius, following Plato and his Neoplatonic interpreters, makes a contrast between the rational philosophy that

persuades by dialectic and the means of *logos* and reason and this latter kind of 'initiation' that is formulated through the *mythos*, for example:

Theological tradition has a dual aspect: the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand [S: *hanc quidem secretam et mysticam*], the open and more evident on the other [S: *illam apparentem et notiozem*]. The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation [E: *eam quidem symbolicam et perfectivam*], the other is philosophical and employs the method of demonstration [E: *hanc vero philosophicam et approbativam*]. The one uses persuasion and imposes the truth of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be taught, perfects the soul in God [S: *illud autem operatur et collocat in Deo indocibilibus mysteriorum perfectionibus*] (Ep. 9:1, Dion: 638).

The *Cloud* author in his Prologue agrees with Dionysius that there is a difference between the 'knowing' that comes from disputation and the 'exoteric sciences' of the theologies and that which comes from the 'mystical initiation'. This is the 'divine enlightenment' [S: *deifica lumina*, Gk: θεαρχικά φῶτα] into which, according to Dionysius, we have been 'initiated by the hidden tradition [S: *occulta traditio*] of our inspired teachers—a tradition at one with scripture' (DN: 1.4).

The *Cloud* author establishes a similar relationship with the addressee of his texts in both the *Cloud* and texts such as the *Book of Privy Counselling* (BCP). In BCP he stresses that he wants to be the 'souereyn goostly' (Hodgson 1944: 153.4–5) of the neophyte and that obedience to him is necessary so that the neophyte will not get stuck in 'the sotil examinacion of thi corious wittys' (Hodgson 1944: 152.20) which will hide the 'werk' of the *Cloud*-practice from him. Up to now the neophyte has been 'ouer wise in thi wittys' (Hodgson 1944: 152.22) which has obscured the work from his soul. For such 'corious witte' which stands in the way of the love message he wants to transmit in the manner prescribed by Hierotheus and Dionysius transcends the *Cloud* author's 'steringes of a fleshly tonge' (Hodgson 1944: 153.18). Tixier, in his penetrating commentary on the work, suggests that the text itself is shot through with the loving affection that the Dionysian *pathein* relationship between teacher and student demands:

These texts, when carefully observed, reveal the existence of an innerlaw of self-effacement which affects not only the relationship between master and disciple, but also the author's style, his choice of images, and even the form in which he presents his teaching ... Writing itself may eventually be seen as a work of love aiming to stimulate the reader to persevere in his 'louely werk' (Tixier 1997: 126).

For the author is working on a style of writing that 'is an attempt to formulate 'something' about him whom no formula can contain' (Tixier 1990: 245). In this respect the *Cloud* author follows his master, Dionysius, in using all the performative games of language at his disposal to initiate the disciple into the mystery that cannot ultimately be put into the words of the 'fleshly tongue'. This is what he refers to throughout his writing as the 'cloude of vnknowyng' (Hodgson 1944: 154.15–17), 'the priue love put in purete of spirit' that he has learned from Dionysius: 'his wisdom and his drewry, his lighty derknes



and his vnknowyn kunnynges.' For such, he understands, is the only way of approaching the Divine nature from the human perspective.

## Darkness and Apophasis: Entering the Cloud

If such 'divine names' transcend all conception and words, how then does Dionysius speak about them, for 'the union of divinised minds with the Light beyond all deity occurs in the cessation of all intelligent activity' (DN: 1.5)? As we have seen throughout this book, drawing from Scripture, the names of God are primarily *praised*. The Trinity, for Dionysius, cannot be expressed, only the 'aporias of unknowing' can contain it.<sup>18</sup> Thus, as we have already seen, Dionysius introduces his *hyper-* terms in DN 2.4 ('supra-essential subsistence, supra-divine divinity, supra-excellent goodness, supremely individual identity') which will be reproduced at the beginning of the *Mystical Theology*. God, for Dionysius, is 'beyond every assertion and denial'. For in the following chapters of the *Divine Names*, Dionysius does not try to *describe* the divine reality but rather plays with various models and pictures of the divine. McGinn suggests that the theological heart of the text seems to be how the utterly unknowable God manifests himself in creation in order that all creation may return to this unknowable source (McGinn 1991: 161). On the level of thought—*intellectus*—the divine is utterly unknowable. This is the point of the aporia, the incomprehensibility, heralded by Dionysius' apophatic strategies which lead to the necessary transformation required by the texts. Both the *Cloud* and Balma employ similar strategies of disorientation, contradiction, aporia, and unknowing to lead the initiate to the place where they too may experience the utter fullness of God's being. This will become Dionysius' famous *stulta sapientia* in DN: 7.1 (Gk: μωρά σοφία) that will play such an important role in the late medieval Dionysian tradition winding its way through the 'mystical discourse' of the late Middle Ages.

Hugh of Balma, for example, agrees with Dionysius on the need for a *stulta sapientia*—a 'foolish wisdom'—which is necessary before the wisdom of the affect can take place, i.e. the apophatic or deconstructive mentioned above. He quotes Chapter 7 of Dionysius' *Divine Names* in VSL: U86 to make this point:

We praise this irrational, useless and foolish wisdom exceedingly, saying that it is the cause of all mind and reason and every wisdom and prudence. From it arises every counsel, knowledge and prudence and in it lie hidden all treasures of wisdom and the science of God... It is a wisdom that no understanding can grasp at all.

Walking around his topic (very much reflecting the 'circular motion' advocated by Dionysius), Balma returns to the practical conditions required to enter this state. The 'truest and most certain knowledge' comes when the *affectus* precedes the *intellectus*.<sup>19</sup> Which leads to a paradox, the wisdom is 'in full view' of 'all worldly philosophers and doctors' but is also 'hidden' (*occulta*) or 'mystical' (*mystica*) 'because few people dispose themselves to receive it and it hides within the heart where neither pen nor word can



fully unravel its complexities' (VSL: U88). In this state 'the *affectus* rules' 'commanding the radical abandonment (*derelinqui*) of the senses and the intellect' (VSL: U89). The wisdom is 'located totally in ardent yearning' and for Balma, quoting Thomas Gallus' commentary on the *Mystical Theology*, this yearning finds its 'principal *affectio*' in the highest part of the soul the *synderesis* 'which alone can be united to the Holy Spirit'. This holy unknowing through love is accessible to the 'simple old woman or rustic shepherd' (*simplex vetula vel rusticus pascualis*) as much, or in many cases, more than the learned philosopher or wise man.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, the *Cloud* author stresses the darkness and unknowing of God that will be central to the initiation into the Divine of his pupil. In Chapter Three of the *Cloud* he states:

Lift up thin herte unto God with a meek steryng of love; and mene Himself, and none of His goodes. And therto loke thee lothe to thenk on ought bot on Hymself, so that nought worche in thi witte ne in thi wille bot only Himself. And do that in thee is to forgete alle the creatures that ever God maad and the werkes of hem, so that thithought ne thi desire be not directe ne streche to any of hem, neither in general ne in special. Bot lat hem be, and take no kepe to hem (Hodgson 1982: 9.11–15).<sup>21</sup>

For, as he famously states:

Lette not therfore, bot travayle therin tyl thou fele lyst. For at the first tyme when thou dost it, thou fyndest bot a derknes, and as it were a cloude of unknowyng, thou wost never what, sayng that thou felist in thi wille a nakid entent unto God. This derknes and this cloude is, howsoever thou dost, bitwix thee and thi God, and letteth thee that thou maist not see Him cleerly by light of understanding in thi reson, nefele Him in swetnes of love in thin affeccion (Hodgson 1982: 9.2–34).<sup>22</sup>

Once in this darkness of unknowing we shall 'cry to the one we love', 'for yifever schalt thou fele Him or see Him, as it may be here, it behoveth alweis be in this cloude and in this derknes. And yif thou wilte besily travayle as I bid thee, I triste in His mercy that thou schalt come therto' (Hodgson 1982: 9.36–39).<sup>23</sup>

Hodgson suggests that the *Cloud's* 'naked intent', 'implies a purified action of the will, freed from all discursive thought, directed to God, solely by faith, believing that God is, but straining to understand what God is' (Hodgson 1944: 185). Following this, the seeker is thus urged to cultivate a 'cloud of unknowing' (whence the title of the work) and 'forgetting' between themselves and all created things:

And yif ever thou schalt come to this cloude, and wone and worche therin as I bid thee, thee byhoveth, as this cloude of unknowyng is aboven thee, bitwix thee and thi God, right so put a cloude of forgetyngbineth thee, bitwix thee and alle the cretures that ever ben maad. Thee thinketh, paraventure, that thou arte ful fer from God, forthi that this cloude of unknowing is bitwix thee and thi God; bot sekirly, and it be wel conseyyed, thou arte wel farther fro Hym when thou hast no cloude of forgetyng bitwix thee and alle the creatures that ever ben maad (Hodgson 1982: 13.24–27).<sup>24</sup>

For by these means alone, according to the *Cloud* author, will we come to the communion with the Divine which his instructions are urging upon his pupil:

But now thou askest me and seiest: 'How schal I think on Himself, and what is Hee?' And to this I cannot answer thee bot thus: 'I wote never.' For thou hast brought me with thi question into that samederknes, and into that same cloude of unknowyng that I wolde thouwere in thiself. For of alle other creatures and their werkes—ye, and of the werkes of God self—may a man thorow grace have fulheed of knowing, and wel to kon thinke on hem; bot of God Himself can no man thinke (Hodgson 1982: 14.14–20).<sup>25</sup>

For Hugh of Balma, likewise, the condition for what he called the 'loving upsurge—*consurrectio*' (VSL: U83) towards God is unknowing or apophysis: *ignorantia*, which leads to affective change:

This *consurrectio*, which is said to occur through unknowing, is nothing other than being moved directly through the ardour of love, without any creaturely image, any leading knowledge or any accompanying movement of *intelligentia*—it is solely a movement of the *affectus* and in its actual practice the speculative knowledge (*speculativa cognitio*) knows nothing.

For the *Cloud* author, quoting Dionysius, this is 'that which is known by unknowing':

On this same maner goostly it farith within in oure goostly wittys, when we travailen aboute the knowyng of God Himself. For have a man never so moche goostly understandyng in knowyng of alle maad goostly thinges, yit may he never bi the werk of his understandyng com to the knowyng of an unmaad goostly thing, the whiche is nought bot God. Bot by the failyng it may; for whi that thing that it failith in is nothyng elles bot only God. And herfore it was that Seynte Denis seyde: 'Themost goodly knowyng of God is that, the whiche is knowyn bi unknowyng' (Hodgson 1982: 69.37–70.6).<sup>26</sup>

This will be the means, then, whereby we are 'oned with God' (Hodgson 1958: 6), not by thinking of saints or angels (or indeed anything) but by 'that dark unencumbered feeling of myself' (Hodgson 1958: 8). What is noticeable however is that the *Cloud* author in particular diverges from Dionysius' apophysis by stressing the naked IS of God rather than stressing Dionysius' definition of God as being *hyper-ousia* (in contrast, for example, with Meister Eckhart). McGinn, amongst others, points out here that the *Cloud* author's ignorance of Dionysian doctrine of God being 'above being' (as the 'hyper-' words discussed above suggest). In this respect McGinn argues that the '*Cloud* author is certainly Dionysian but in a limited sense' (McGinn 2012: 398), or as Walsh puts it: 'it is difficult to estimate just how familiar the author is with all the "works of Denys"' (Walsh 1981: 256, see also Hodgson 1958: 4; 143.17–22 and 144.1–4 where she draws attention to the difference between the naked IS of the *Cloud* author in contrast to

Dionysius' 'over-being').<sup>27</sup> As we argue in the present essay, the author of the *Cloud*, as indeed Balma, is saturated with the language and style of the Dionysian writings, especially as refracted through the Victorine affective interpretation, but this does not constrain him from feeling free to adapt them so that they may flourish in the very different soil of late medieval English mystical discourse.

## Desire and Eros: *Affectus* and *Intellectus*

Having transcended the knowing function the interpreters of affective Dionysianism at this point stress the role of affect in ascending to the Divine. Here they justify their approach by stressing Dionysius' own emphasis on the role of *eros* in the ascent to the Divine. In McGinn's words: 'the Dionysian program is a cosmic one in which the divine *Eros* refracts itself into the multiple theophanies of the universe, which in turn erotically strive to pass beyond their multiplicity back into simple unity' (McGinn 1991: 161). All movement in the hierarchy of creation, for Dionysius, comes from above and is 'fundamentally erotic'. Not only do all things strive erotically for the Beautiful and the Good (DN: 4), but the Deity itself is *Eros*: 'divine love is the Good seeking Good for the sake of the Good [S: *est divinus amor bonus boni propter bonum*]' (DN: 4.10). For:

It must be said that the very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign eros for all is carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by agape and by eros and is enticed away from his dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself. (DN 4.13, trans. McGinn, 1991).

Or to put it in the terms of our late medieval authors, it is an *affectus* as much as the *intellectus*. The model here being St Paul, Dionysius's ecstatic teacher and erotic initiator:

This is why the great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20). Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself for God (2 Cor. 5:13), possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned (in eros), as exceptionally beloved. (DN: 4.13 trans. McGinn, 1991).

Similarly the *Cloud* author wants to educate the desire of his pupil using the same Dionysian language:

Alle thi liif now behoveth algates to stonde in desire, yif thou schalt profite in degre of perfeccion. This desire behoveth algates be wroughtin thi wille bi the honde of Almighti God and thi consent. Bot oo thing I telle thee: he is a gelous lover and suffreth no felawship, and him list not worche in thi wille bot yif He be only with thee bi Hymself (Hodgson 1982: 8–9).<sup>28</sup>

Tixier points out (1997: 119, fn. 19) that the *Cloud* author in these passages translates Sarracenus's *palpare* (literally: 'to stroke, caress') with the Middle English 'fele', 'hold' and 'grappe', thus giving an earthy substance to the contact with God. Here the *Cloud* author reflects the late medieval tendency in its *theologia mystica* to adopt earthy and embodied terms in the vernacular for some of the more spiritualized senses of the early medieval mystical interpretation of Dionysius.

In this context Hugh of Balma's text is important as it condenses the views on the *intellectus* and *affectus* presented, implicitly and explicitly, in earlier interpretations such as those found in Gallus, refining their use and scope. The first four paragraphs of Hugh's Prologue to the *Viae* present a picture of the discourse that will follow. He paints two contrasting images, much as would a medieval wall painter. On the one side is the 'human curiosity' or 'useless science' ('*Relicta humana curiositate scientiae inutilis argumentorum et opinionum captiva*' VSL: 3), the knowledge of 'philosophers, scholars and secular masters' (VSL: 4), searching after new curiosities, proofs and ideas contained within the covers of 'sheepskin quartos' (VSL: 2). This is the 'mortal philosophy' to be found in Plato and Aristotle.

In contrast to this mortal philosophy we have the other picture—that of the *vera sapientia*, the 'true knowledge' that will be expounded in his pages. The first type of knowledge has held people captive (here Hugh gives us a reference to Ecclesiastes 1:13)<sup>29</sup> which is why 'the roads to Sion mourn'—*Viae Sion lugent*—the title of the manuscript. Crucially, this first type of knowledge does not allow the 'flaming affections of love' *per flammigeras amoris adfectiones* to reach the Creator. The second type of knowledge, the *vera sapientia*, or as he refers to later, the *mystica theologia*, (VSL: 2) is the knowledge that arises from this flaming affection of love which inflames the affect (*affectus*) and enlightens the intellect (*intellectus*) (VSL: 3). These 'fiery aspirations of love' raise the soul to God and true knowledge: 'very rapidly, quicker than can be thought, without any prior or concomitant *cogitatio*, whenever she pleases, hundreds or thousands of times both day and night, the soul is drawn to possess God alone through countless yearning desires' (VSL: 5).

These 'flaming desires' are the engine by which this wisdom is achieved—for it is an affective and performative wisdom. This is acquired by 'practice of the purgative and illuminative ways': 'Thus, through practice in the purgative and illuminative ways and under the inward instruction and direction of God alone, the soul learns experientially what no mortal science or eloquence can unlock' (VSL: 5).

This knowledge is *performative*, in that it is not acquired through discourse but by *practice*:

This wisdom requires first that one perceive truth experientially within oneself... This wisdom is to be distinguished from all other sciences in that it has to be put to use within oneself before its words can be understood—*practice precedes theory (et practica ibi praecedat theoricam)*' (VSL: 9)

Thus reflecting the Hierotheian–Dionysian initiation mentioned earlier. *Solus amor*, love alone is the vehicle that provides this knowledge—'Neither *ratio* understands or *intellectus* sees, rather, as it is said: '*Gustate et videte*—Taste and See' (VSL: 9).

The *Cloud* author too divides our faculty of knowing into that derived from a 'knowing power' (Balma's *intellectus*) and that from a 'loving power' (Balma's *affectus*):

Alle resonable creatures, aungel and man, hath in hem, ilchone by hemself, o principal worching might, the whiche is clepid a knowable might, and another principal worching might, the whiche is clepid a lovyng might: of the whiche two mightes, to the first, the whiche is a knowyng might, God, that is the maker of hem, is evermore incomprehensible; and to the secound, the whiche is the lovyng myght, in ilch one diversly He is al comprehensible at the fulle, insomochel that o lovyng soule only in itself, by vertewe of love, schuld comprehende in it Hym that is sufficient at the fulle—and mochel more, withoute comparison—to fille alle the soules and aungelles that ever may be (Hodgson 1982: 10).<sup>30</sup>

In Chapter Six of the *Cloud* this is famously described as the 'dart of longing love' that seems close here to what Hugh of Balma (and Gallus before him) were describing as the 'flaming affections of love'. For, as the *Cloud* author states, 'we may know him by love but by thought never':<sup>31</sup>

And therefore, thof al it be good sumtyme to think of the kyndnes and the worthines of God in special, and thof al it be a light and a party of contemplacion, nevertheles in this werk it schal be casten down and keverid with a cloude of forgetyng. And thou schalt step aboven it stalworthly, bot listely, with a devoute and a plesing stering of love, and fonde for to peerse that derknes aboven thee. And smyte apon that thicke cloude of unknowyng with a scharp darte of longing love, and go not thens for thing that befallith.<sup>32</sup>

This beam of 'ghostly light' will thus set the 'affection aflame':

Than wil He sumtyme paraventure seend oute a beme of goostly light, peersyng this cloude of unknowing that is bitwix thee and hym, and schewe thee sum of His privete, the whiche man may not, ne kan not, speke. Than schalt thou fele thine affection enflaumid with the fiire of his love, fer more then I kan telle thee, or may, or wile, at this tyme. For of that werke that fallith to only God dar I not take apon me to speke with my blabryng fleschely tonge; and schortly to say, althof I durst, I wolde not. Bot of that werk that falleth to man, whan he felith him sterid and holpin by grace, list me wel telle thee; for therin is the lesse peril of the two<sup>33</sup> (Hodgson 1982: 32).

Thus the work of the *Cloud* is the striking on this 'cloud of unknowing' which the *intellectus* faces when it tries to comprehend God with the 'dart of longing love' that arises from the flaming *affectus*. It is to the nature of this 'work' that we turn next.<sup>34</sup>

## The Werk of the *Cloud*

Having thus delineated the spiritual anthropology of the ascent of the soul, based as we have seen very firmly on Dionysius as understood through his Parisian interpreters,

both Balma and the *Cloud* author stress the practical ‘werk’ required in treading the path to ‘one-ing’. The *Cloud* author in particular, in numerous famous passages, stresses the importance of this *praxis*:

And yif any thought rise and wil prees algates aboven thee, bitwix thee and that derknes, and asche thee seiing: ‘What sekist thou, and what woldest thou have?’ sey thou that it is God that thou woldest have. ‘Him I coveite, Him I seche, and noght bot Him.’ And yif he ascke thee what is that God, sey thou that it is God that maad thee and bought thee, and that graciously hath clepid thee to His love. And in Himsei thou kanst no skile. And therfore sey: ‘Go thou down agein.’ And treed him fast down with a steryng of love thof he seme to thee right holy, and seme to thee as he wolde help thee to seke Hym (Hodgson 1982: 14–15).<sup>35</sup>

In particular advocating in the same chapter that the pupil should take a simple word of one syllable that is repeated continuously to ‘short-circuit’ the discursive rhythm of the *intellectus* to allow the surging *affectus* to rise to God. This, as far as I know, is the first instance of a commentator on the Dionysian texts taking the old monastic practice of the repetition of a simple word (what is usually referred to in the Orthodox tradition as the ‘Jesus prayer’ and in wider Eastern traditions as a use of ‘mantra’) and applying it as the means to enter the necessary affective space for the ‘one-ing’ with God. Herein the *Cloud* author certainly shows a bold originality:

Take thee bot a litil worde of o silable; for so it is betir then of two, for ever the schorter it is, the betir it acordeth with the werk of the spirite. And soche a worde is this worde *God* or this worde *love*. Cheese thee whether thou wilt, or another as thee list: whiche that thee liketh best of o silable. And fasten this worde to thin herte, so that it never go thens for thing that bifalleth.

This worde schal be thi scheeld and thi spere, whether thou ridest on pees or on werre. With this worde thou schalt bete on this cloude and this derknes aboven thee. With this worde thou schalt smite doun al maner thought under the cloude of forgetting; insomochel that yif any thought prees apon thee to aske thee what thou woldest have, answeere him with no mo wordes bot with this o worde (Hodgson 1982: 15–16).<sup>36</sup>

Tixier, referencing Gilson, refers to the ‘werk’ thus advocated by the *Cloud* author as ‘an exercise in careful introspection under the affectionate gaze of God’ (Tixier 1997: 116), what he calls a form of ‘Christian self-knowledge’ and, in the view of the present author at least, a forerunner of what we could today call a type of Christian mindfulness (see Tyler 2018).

One final thing to be noted in respect to the ‘werk’ of the *Cloud* (as opposed to that presented in the original Dionysian sources) is that the author constantly stresses the need for it take place against the backdrop of the believing community, the Church. Thus, as well as his insistence that his pupil have a ‘ghostly father’ (i.e. a spiritual director) to remain ‘part of Christ’s body’ (*The Cloud*, Ch. 25), there are constant exhortations for the need for sacramental confession (Ch. 28) and to pay heed to the teachings of the Church in all matters covered during the discourse, for by these means the Church will protect us from straying far from our goal.

## The Ludus Amoris

Commentators such as Tixier have stressed the role in the *Cloud* in particular of the 'love game' of the medieval courtly love tradition. It is possible to understand this 'hide and seek' as the *Cloud* author's interpretation of the 'circling motion' of Dionysius dressed in language suitable for his contemporaries. If, as we have argued in this chapter, we see the Dionysian inheritance of the *Cloud* as advocating the indirect transmission between the master and pupil then the 'love game', the *ludus amoris*, is an appropriate expression of that transmission. As the author of the *Cloud* puts it in Chapter 46 where he describes the journey to the Divine 'one-ing' as 'some sort of game':

And gamenly be it seyde, I rede that thu do that in thee is, refreynnyng the rude and the grete steryng of thi spirite; ryght as thou on no wyse woldest lat Hym wite hou fayne thou woldest see Hym and have Hym or fele Hym (Hodgson 1982: 48).<sup>37</sup>

For, as he writes in the *Book of Privy Counsel*, God withdraws his face only to return with it later and that this loving search is a form of love-making:

Inasmuch as he is sometimes absent and sometimes present, he wishes by this coming and going to test you secretly and to form you for his own work... whenever he goes away he will come more worthily and merrily than ever (Walsh 1988: 244–245)<sup>38</sup>

The seeker will become 'unclothed: that is, you are not wrapped in any of the sensible consolations which may be experienced in this life, no matter how sweet or holy they may be' (Walsh 1988: 245). After this God will 'loke up, paraventure right sone, and effe touch thee with a more fervent stering of that same grace than ever you feltest any before' (Hodgson 1944: 167).<sup>39</sup> Throughout God's aim in this love-game is that 'he will have thee maad as pleying to his wille goostly as a roon glove to thin honde bodely' (Hodgson 1944: 168).<sup>40</sup>

The *Cloud* author thus describes the perfect love-game in his missives that direct the soul to the naked, total encounter with the loved one if the way and procedure is followed correctly. Tixier concludes that 'by its content and style the *Cloud* is in fact a love letter and is meant to be read as such' (Tixier 1990: 129). Which, as we have argued in this essay, places it firmly in the Dionysian tradition of initiation through *Eros* that has been explored throughout the present volume while pointing to the affective spirituality that will so dominate the Western Christian tradition on the eve of the Reformation.

## The Difficult Question

To conclude this short survey of Dionysian themes in the *Cloud* and Balma it is necessary to finish with the issue with which Balma concludes the *Viae*—the so-called 'difficult question'. This is as he states it:



Whether the soul in her *affectus* can, by aspiration and yearning, be moved into God without any of the intellect's *cogitatio* leading the way or keeping her company? (VSL: Q1).<sup>41</sup>

As well as having intrinsic theological interest itself—far beyond the scope of this short essay—the question is indicative of the path that Western affective spirituality would take after the absorption of the Dionysian/Victorine insights. The flaming affect so lauded by the *Cloud* author and Balma, and which will have so much influence on the later Spanish schools of affective spirituality (via Balma's work), also inevitably raised questions as to the role of the intellect and reason in the midst of these flaming affections. The trials and tribulations of later 'mystics' such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Ignatius Loyola, and even Madame Jeanne Guyon are surely foreshadowed in Balma's concluding discussions.<sup>42</sup> Thus the *Quaestio* goes right to the heart not only of the central question of Balma's treatise—what is the nature of the relationship between the affect and the intellect in the life of prayer, contemplation, and Christian life in general—but also to the heart of the affective Dionysianism that we see developing in the latter period of the Middle Ages.

In scholastic fashion Balma first essays the reasons for suggesting that *intellectus* comes before the *affectus*. Here, as throughout the treatise, he stays close to Dionysius' texts to evince his arguments. These include, quoting DN: 7.1 (*Dionysiaca* 1:868A, Luibheid: 106), describing how the soul becomes 'deified' through love of God and entering into the life of the Trinity. As the wisdom of the Son precedes the love of the Spirit in the procession of the Trinity, therefore 'cogitative knowing always precedes the affection of love' (VSL: Q5). Again quoting Dionysius,<sup>43</sup> he argues that the ecclesiastical order of the Church Militant reflects the celestial order of the Church Triumphant in the sequence Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim. The Cherubim, whose name means 'fullness of knowledge' precede the Seraphim, those who are called the 'ardent' or 'flaming'. Therefore the contemplation of the Cherubim must precede the flaming love of the Seraphim.

In contrast, to support the statement, Balma again uses Dionysius to make his argument. Here he quotes Dionysius once again from the first chapter of the *Mystica Theologia*:

You therefore, dear Timothy, who are concerned with mystical visions, abandon with great effort the senses and intellectual operations, all sensible and intellectual objects, everything being and not existing and, as much as is possible, surge up in unknowing to that union which is beyond all substance and cognition (*Dionysiaca* 1: 567, Luibheid: 135).

Thus, in 'the ascent of the mystical love' (*In consurrectione amoris mystica*) we should abandon all intellectual operation and *cogitatio* to surge up solely for the union of affective love. Therefore, the surge of love 'truly happens' without *cogitatio* leading the way. He then cites Gallus' translation of the *Mystica Theologia*, where, he says, we read that 'the soul leaves behind intellectual knowledge to know the God above the *intellectus* and *mens*.' God therefore is truly known through the 'touch of love' (*per tactum amoris*).

‘Thus, to speak plainly, all *intellectus* must be abandoned and one surges to God solely through the *affectus* of love’ (VSL: Q13).

Quoting again *The Divine Names* Balma suggests that in ‘true and experiential knowledge of divine things’ one ought to sense first through love before using *intellectus* to ponder the One. ‘For that which the *affectus* senses experientially (*experimentaliter*), the divine names, she then truly understands in the *intellectus*.’ The loving upsurge of the *affectus* teaches us through existential engagement thus establishing its knowing on a deeper and fuller level than the *intellectus*. Finally he turns once again to DN: 7.1 (*Dionysiaca* 1: 386, Luibheid: 106) in which the Areopagite praises ‘this irrational, useless and foolish wisdom exceedingly, saying that it is the cause of all mind and reason and every wisdom and prudence. From it arises every counsel, knowledge and prudence and in it lie hidden all treasures of wisdom and the science of God’. Such *stulta sapientia* is, he claims an ‘irrational knowledge’ (*irracionalem*) and cannot proceed like ‘the other scholastic sciences’ (*alia scholastic scientia*) where we must first *know* everything that we understand. The ‘mystical theology’ therefore proceeds in a unique way—it is the ‘foolish science’ for ‘the *affectus* of love is set on fire without any mental cogitation or meditation’.

He concludes by stating that as the soul proceeds along the purgative and illuminative ways described above it is met by this inflaming from on high. ‘Now we find love’s affection preceding cogitation—what the *affectus* feels the *intellectus* truly understands’ (VSL: Q33). This second affective blaze takes place through the Holy Spirit touching the synderesis of the soul—the ‘apex of the *affectus*’ (*apex adfectus*): ‘Just as a stone pulled by its own weight is naturally drawn down to its own center, so the apex of the *affectus* by its own weight is carried up to God directly and immediately, without any oblique tangentiality without any cogitation leading the way or keeping it company’ (VSL: Q34). The affect is able, on account of its nature (*naturaliter*), to reach the union with God without the help of the intellect. This highest power, this synderesis, can reach union without the intellect: ‘than is possible through any sort of investigating intellect or reason’ (VSL: Q36).

In conclusion from the discussion we are left in no doubt that the true path to union with God is to be found through affective unknowing. As Balma concludes the *Viae*: ‘The soul who truly loves is able to surge up to God through an *affectus* set afire by love’s yearning, without any cogitation leading the way. Amen’; his final resting position on the disputed question.<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS: ‘TRAVAYLE FAST IN THIS NOUGHT AND THIS NOUGHWHERE’

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Viewing the linguistic approaches of the *Cloud*<sup>45</sup> and the *Viae* together one is struck by the force and power of the interpretation both authors give to the traditional Dionysian themes. All the tropes and arguments of the Dionysian tradition are there but they are decked out in dynamically rich clothing which will make not only Dionysius, but

affective Dionysianism itself, attractive to subsequent generations of spiritual writers. Not least of these are the Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century who will receive the tradition via the Spanish translation of the *Viae*—the *Sol de Contemplativos*—published in Toledo in 1514. It was quickly followed by editions in Seville (1543), Medina (1553), and Alcalá (1558) and widely disseminated and quoted within the Spanish mystical tradition.<sup>46</sup>

As commentators such as Martin and Tixier point out, it is important not to engage in a too *linear* interpretation of the texts as, following Dionysius, they present a ‘hymning’ of the Divine search for ‘one-ness’ without necessarily being too concerned with the subtle niceties of the scholastics, who indeed, as we have seen, they often denounce as leading seekers down the wrong path. As Martin puts it:

Hugh’s language of ascent is nearly always dynamic, rarely static. He is forever talking about being moved into God, being impelled into God, a staccato drumbeat of *movetur, consurgere, consurrectio, motio*. Since we have no real equivalent in English, it is difficult for modern English-speaking readers to grasp that even the word ‘affective’ is based on a past participle that describes something that has happened: One is affected, one is moved, swayed, impacted by something (Martin 1997: 37)

Although both Balma and the author of the *Cloud* are aware of the scholastic disputes and debates of their time, we can from time to time detect the possibility that they may be subtly mocking the scholastic method.

In their own ways both authors seek to work on the affect by circumventing the workings of the intellect through a series of bold and pioneering strategies that we have explored here—all ultimately derived of course from their reading of the Victorine-inspired Dionysian *corpus*. As Tixier states, a mystical text must ultimately be a ‘limping text’ for ‘like Jacob, it bears within itself a hidden wound, which is a wound of love’ (Tixier 1997: 131). Both Balma and the *Cloud* author use the classical methods of ‘mystical unseeing’—paradox, contradiction, and teasing play—to gently move us from the *intellectus* to the *affectus*.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of the *Cloud* this is made more potent by the stealthy employment of the nascent Middle-English vernacular to get across points with a verbal virtuosity that will introduce new word-pictures, tropes, and images to the spiritual search that will long influence the spiritual vocabulary of the English language.<sup>48</sup> Middle English would thus prove a remarkably robust medium for the transmission of the thought of Dionysius to a new culture and age.

Just as Balma’s text will go on to influence a later generation of Iberian mystics, so too the combination of practical and apophatic theology in the *Cloud* will also initiate a new wave of Dionysian interpretation in pre-Reformation British spirituality that continues, via writers such as Augustine Baker and later Justin McCann, William Johnston, and Evelyn Underhill, to influence contemporary English spiritual writing up to the present day. In this respect the anonymous vernacular texts of the *Cloud*, *Privy Counselling*, and *Hid Divinitie* can be seen as just as significant in the history of the development of

Dionysian influence as the leap from Greek to Latin in the schools of the Latin West in the early Middle Ages. The challenges and questions posed by that leap stay with us to this day.

## NOTES

1. For a comprehensive analysis of this development see, in particular, Harrington 2004.
2. Harrington's 2004 edition of Eriugena's translation of the corpus is derived principally from manuscripts MS.Paris, *Bibliothèque nationale*, lat. 17341 (C) and lat. 1619 (D). These both date from the thirteenth century and in the case of 1619(D) may have belonged to the University of Paris as early as 1275. See also *Dion* 1: lxxvii–lxxx. From hereon I shall refer to Eriugena's translation with the abbreviation E and that of Sarracenus with S.
3. Reprinted in *Dion* 1: 710–712.
4. This was finally followed by a full *Explanacio* of the whole corpus produced between 1241 and 1243, the date of his exile from Vercelli. This has not received a full modern critical edition despite the pioneering work of Théry, although much is to be found in Walsh's doctoral dissertation on Gallus (Walsh 1957).
5. David Bell notes (1978: 265) that Thomas the Cistercian in his Commentary on the Song of Songs 'does not seem to care for Pseudo-Dionysius... It is interesting to note the conspicuous lack of Dionysian ideas and terminology in Thomas's works... Thomas, like Bernard, remains Latin'.
6. The influence of Balma on the author of the *Cloud* is a vexed one and not easily resolved. While stating that 'we must accept it as feasible that our author was acquainted with *Viae Sion Lugent*', James Walsh also suggests that they may have used a common source (Walsh 1988: 20). There are clear differences in style and intent—Balma is more scholastic in his approach, the *Cloud* author more practical and pedagogical. By tracing the Dionysian themes in both, as I attempt in this essay, I aim to show how the 'Dionysian climate' of late medieval spirituality could influence such diverse authors and yet share common themes. What is clear, however, as will be explored here, is that the Dionysian corpus was well established and admired in the late medieval Carthusian houses.
7. Hereafter VSL. Although, as we shall see, the text is often referred to and printed as the *Theologia Mystica* of Hugh of Balma we shall use the title of *Viae Sion Lugent* in this essay to avoid confusion with the *Theologia Mystica* of Dionysius. As with Dionysius himself there remains similar confusion as to the authorial identity of the texts we shall consider in this essay.
8. There being records that the de Balmey family, to which Hugh, the supposed author of the treatise, belonged, also held the lands of Dorche up to the latter half of the thirteenth century (Guinan 1994: 51).
9. The 1495 Strasbourg edition of the *Collected Works of Bonaventure*, for example, not only included the *Viae Sion Lugent* but also modified certain references to the Carthusian order in order to refer to the Franciscan order.
10. Rather than use the series of texts related to the first Franciscan Strasbourg edition ('A': see Martin 61) both Ruello in his critical edition and Martin in his English translation use a third set of texts which circulated in the early fifteenth century 'in the Austrian-Bavarian circles where all the Hugh of Balma scholars seem to have been concentrated'.

11. The text itself comprises a Prologue setting the scene and context (within the scholastic disputes then present), a treatise on the 'three ways' as then understood, here the Dionysian influence is clearly felt especially in paragraphs 82–115 of the *via unitiva* which is a commentary on Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*. The final section contains a separate treatise on the *Quaestio Difficilis* ('Difficult Question'): 'Utrum scilicet anima, secundum suum adfectum, possit aspirando vel desiderando moveri in Deum, sine aliqua cogitatione intellectus praeuia vel concomitante?'/ 'Whether the soul in her *affectus* can, by aspiration and yearning, be moved into God without any of the intellect's *cogitatio* leading the way or keeping her company?' We shall return to this at the end of this essay.
12. I shall use here the Middle English versions edited by Phyllis Hodgson in her 1944, 1958, and 1982 editions of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the other related treatises (details in Bibliography), I have adapted her text from the Middle English script to contemporary English script. For contemporary translations into Modern English I have drawn upon James Walsh's *The Cloud of Unknowing* (1981) and *The Pursuit of Wisdom* (1988), however I have modified these translations for the purposes of this essay to bring them closer to the Middle English originals.
13. Hodgson in her text lists seventeen extant manuscripts of the *Cloud* (Hodgson 1944: lxi–lxii), three of which have inscriptions from Carthusian houses: MS. Harl. 2773, written at Mount Grace Charterhouse in Yorkshire and annotated, as noted, by Grenehalgh at Sheen and MSS Douce 262 and Parkminster D.176 both copied at the London Charterhouse. These two latter copies would make their way to the Low Countries during the Reformation and owe their survival due to the recusant Catholic communities there (see also Lees 1983: 380). Lees concludes that 'what is known of the attitudes to Dionysian theology in the English branch of the Carthusian order tends to confirm rather than exclude its members as likely contenders for the authorship of the text' (Lees 1983: 410). Interestingly, the four known copies of the VSL in circulation in late medieval England are all associated with Charterhouses (Lees 1983: 446). From the dialect of the author of the *Cloud*, Hodgson concludes that the Charterhouse of Beauvale at Gresley (founded 1343) is the most likely candidate for the home of the author, other suggestions have included Hull (founded 1378/9), Coventry (1381), and Mount Grace (1398), although the latter is probably too late in foundation to be considered likely.
14. 'Neither read it yourself, write it, tell others about it or allow it to be read, written or spoken about, by anyone to anyone unless that person has (according to your opinion) a true will and wholesome intent to be a perfect follower of Christ.'
15. 'Beware that no unwise men, though having adequate wit, hear these things.' The Latin text of Sarracenus reads: 'Vide autem ut nullus indoctorum ista audiat. Istos autem dico qui in exsistentibus sunt formati, nihil super exsistentia supersubstantialiter esse opinantes, sed putantes scire ea quae secundum ipsos est cognitione, eum qui ponit tenebras latibulum suum' Hodgson 1958: 95. 5–8.
16. 'I call all these men those who are fastened to knowing and loving those things that are knowable and have a beginning; those, that is, who think that nothing exists above the aforesaid mentioned things.'
17. 'Worldly chatterboxes, who brazenly flatter or censure themselves or others, the rumour-mongers, the gossips, the tittle-tattlers and the fault-finders of every sort' (Walsh 1988: 102).
18. For a full account of the 'mystical languages of unsaying' in Dionysius and his followers see Sells 1994.

19. See also here Martin's comments on the importance of the affective interpretation of Dionysius that Hugh receives from Thomas Gallus (1997: 39). Also Walsh (1957) and Ruello (1981).
20. This mention of the simple old woman and the shepherd/fool will be a constant refrain through the later Spanish writers influenced by Balma including Francisco de Osuna, García de Cisneros, and Teresa of Avila, we shall return to this influence at the end of the essay.
21. 'Lift up your heart to God with a meek stirring of love; and have Himself in your sight, and none of His goods. And thereto, be careful not to think of anything but Himself. So that there is no work for your wit, nor in your will to focus on, but only Himself. And do that in yourself so as to forget all the creatures that ever God made and the works of them; so that your thought and your desire are not directed nor stretched to any of them, neither in general nor in particular, but let them be, and take no heed of them.'
22. 'Do not hang back, therefore, but work hard on it until you feel the quickening desire. For when you first begin the exercise you will only find darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing. You don't know what it is, except that you feel a naked intent towards God. This darkness and this cloud will be, no matter what you do, between yourself and your God, and it causes you neither to see Him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason, nor feel Him in the sweetness of love in your affection.'
23. 'For if you will ever feel Him or see Him, as it may be here, it will always be in this cloud and in this darkness. And if you work hard on it as I bid you, I trust in His mercy that you shall come to this place.'
24. 'And if ever you shall come to this cloud and dwell and work therein as I bid you, then just as this cloud of unknowing is above you, between you and your God, so put a cloud of forgetting beneath yourself; between you and all the creatures that were ever made. You think, perhaps, that you are very far from God because this cloud of unknowing is between you and your God, but surely, if you consider it carefully, you are much further from Him when you have no cloud of forgetting between yourself and all the creatures that were ever made.'
25. 'But now you ask me and say, "How shall I think of Himself, and what is He?" and to this I cannot answer but can only say: "I have no idea." For by means of this question you have brought me into that same darkness, and into that same cloud of unknowing, that I would you were in yourself. For a man by grace may know of all other creatures and their works, yes, and of the works of God's self, and he may well reflect upon them. But of God Himself no man can think.'
26. 'The same is true spiritually about our spiritual capacities, when we work hard on knowing about God himself. For no matter how much spiritual understanding a man may have knowing about all such matters, yet by means of his intellect can he never come to knowledge of an uncreated spiritual thing, which of course is God. But by relinquishing the understanding he may. For the understanding fails in nothing else but God alone. And it was for this reason that Saint Denys said: "the best means to come to knowing God is through the unknowing-knowing".'
27. See also McGinn 2012: 398, 634 for a good discussion of this: 'Since the Cloud, Chapter 70, cites DN 7:3, it would seem that this is a conscious disagreement on the author's part'.
28. 'All your life now you have to stand in desire, if you shall profit in degree of perfection. This desire must always be at work in your will, by the hand of almighty God and your consent.



- But one thing I tell you: he is a jealous lover and allows no other partnership, and he has no desire to not work in your will unless he is there alone with you, by himself.
29. 'With the help of wisdom I have been at pains to study all that is done under heaven; oh, what a weary task God has given mankind to labour at! I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and what vanity it all is, what chasing of the wind!... Much wisdom, much grief. The more knowledge, the more sorrow.'
  30. 'All rational creatures, angel and man alike, have in them each one by himself, one principal working power, which is called a knowing power, and another principal working power, which is called a loving power. Of these two powers, to the first, that is the knowing power, God who is the maker of them, is always incomprehensible; and to the second, that is the loving power, He is completely comprehensible to each one individually. Inasmuch that one loving soul in itself, by virtue of love should comprehend in itself Him that is sufficient to the full—and much more, without comparison—to fill all the souls and angels that ever may be.'
  31. 'By love may He be getyn and holden; bot bi thought neither' (Hodgson 1982: 14).
  32. 'And therefore, although it is good at times to think of the kindness and the worthiness of God in particular, and although this is a light and a part of contemplation: nevertheless yet in this work it must be cast down and covered with a cloud of forgetting. And you shall step above it stalwartly, but ardently, with a devout and a pleasing stirring of love, and try to pierce that darkness above you. And smite upon that thick cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing love; and do not leave this work for anything that may happen.'
  33. 'Then will He sometimes send out a beam of ghostly light, piercing this cloud of unknowing that is between you and Him; and show you some of His secrets, of which man may not, nor cannot speak. Then you will feel your affection inflamed with the fire of His love, far more than I can tell you, or may or will at this time. For of that work, that falls only to God, dare I not take upon me to speak with my blabbering fleshly tongue: and shortly to say, although I dared so to speak I would not. But of that work that falls to man when he feels him stirred and helped by grace, I would tell you with delight: for it is less dangerous to speak of this than the other.'
  34. It is notable that throughout his commentary on Dionysius (via Sarracenus' translation) the *Cloud* author continually interjects this all important 'affecioun' in his translation of Dionysius (see Tixier p. 131 and Hodgson 1958: 1 and 1944: 2.25, 3.1, 3.16–17, 4.25, and 5.15).
  35. 'And if any thought rise and will press continually above you, between you and that darkness, and ask you saying, "What are you looking for, and what would you have?" say that it is God that you seek and would have. "Him I covet, Him I seek, and nought but Him." And if the thought should ask you, "What is that God?" say to it, that it is God that made and bought you, and that graciously has called you to his love. "And in Him," say, "you have no skill." And therefore say, "Go down again," and tread the thought fast down with a stirring of love, although it seems to you to be right holy, and seem to you as if it would help you to seek God.'
  36. 'Take just a little word of one syllable: for so it is better than of two, for ever the shorter it is the better it accords with the work of the Spirit. And such a word is this word "God" or this word "Love". Choose whichever you will, or another; as you fancy, which you like best of one syllable. And fasten this word to your heart, so that it will never leave you no matter what happens. This word shall be your shield and your spear, whether you ride into peace or war. With this word you shall beat on this cloud and this darkness above you.



- With this word, you shall smite down all manner of thought under the cloud of forgetting. Inasmuch, that if any thought press upon you to ask you what you would do, answer them with no more words but with this one word.'
37. 'And as though it be a game, I advise you to do this, refraining the coarse and great stirring of your spirit, as though you wouldn't let Him know how much you desired to see Him and have Him or feel Him ...'
  38. See also Hodgson 1944: 151 on the 'love triste,' Hodgson 1944: 21 on the 'love knot,' and Hodgson 1944: 156 on Christ as 'the perfect lover.'
  39. 'Look up, peradventure right soon, and after touch you with a more fervent stirring of that same grace than ever you felt before.'
  40. 'To make you as close fitting to his spiritual will as a soft leather glove fits your bodily hand.'
  41. The concluding section of Balma's treatise seems stylistically to inhabit a different world from the rest of the work, suggesting to some commentators (e.g. Walach) that it was written first and possibly by an author more familiar with the disputes and ways of the schoolmen than the traditional attribution to the Prior of Meyriat would allow. Martin, however, suggests that such sources as are referred to by Balma could easily have been accessible at 'out-of-the-way Carthusian houses' (Martin 1997: 10). He also disputes Walach's claim that the *quaestio* came first while recognizing that the separate sections of the VSL could have been written in a different chronological order before being brought together.
  42. For more on the later eighteenth-century 'crisis of mysticism' see Tyler, *Jeanne-Marie Guyon: Christian Mindfulness or Mystical Contemplation?*, University of Geneva, forthcoming.
  43. Martin cites CH: 6.2 (*Dion* 1:386, Luibheid: 106); Ruello, on the other hand, cites EH: 1 (*Dion* 2:1071, Luibheid: 195)—it seems either will do to give the sense that Hugh connotes.
  44. 'Patet ergo evidenter quod anima vere amans potest consurgere in Deum per adfectum accensus amoris desiderio, sine aliqua cogitatione praevia. Amen.'
  45. Hodgson 1982: 69.
  46. Charting the influences of the *Cloud* are more difficult due to its interrupted reception history. It circulated amongst the British Catholic recusants in exile in France and the Low Countries and was admired by Augustine Baker, amongst others. However it is not until its later publication in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that it can really be said to have influenced latter-day spiritual movements.
  47. Examples of this include, *inter alia*, the *Cloud* author's discussion of 'blind beholding' (C: 8.36), 'hid showing' (C: 47), 'knowing by unknowing' (C: 70), 'nakedly clothing' (BPC, Hodgson 144: 169), and the 'lighty darkness and his unknown cunningness' (BPC, Hodgson 1944: 154). This latter, he says, 'will bring you into silence in your thoughts as well as your words' (Walsh 1988: 234). For more on these 'mystical strategies' see Tyler 2011.
  48. Examples include, the clouds of unknowing and forgetting themselves, the spark of burning coal, the leash of longing, and the simile of the greyhound (C: 46): 'And leerne thee to love listely with a softe and a demure contenance, as wel in body as in soule. And abide curtesly and meekly the wil of oure Lorde, and lache not over-hastely, as it were a gredy grehounde, hungre thee never so sore' ('and learn thee to love passionately, with a soft and a demure behaviour as well in body as in soul; and abide courteously and meekly the will of our Lord, and snatch not overhastily, as it were a greedy greyhound, even though you are so hungry'), (Hodgson 1982: 48) see also Tixier 1997: 129.

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### Abbreviations

- BPC *The Book of Privy Counselling*  
 C *The Cloud of Unknowing*  
 CH *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius  
 DHD *Deonise Hid Divinitie*  
 Dion *Dionysiaca*  
 DN *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius  
 EH *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Dionysius  
 Ep *Epistles*, Dionysius  
 MT *The Mystical Theology*, Dionysius  
 VSL *Viae Lugent Sion*, Hugh of Balma

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## CHAPTER 29

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# DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE AND NICHOLAS OF CUSA

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THEO KOBUSCH TRANSLATED BY MARK EDWARDS

IN the following essay the close affinity between Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite and Nicholas of Cusa will be illustrated with regard to three important doctrines: *Complicatio and explicatio*; *Docta ignorantia*; and *Non-aliud*. In all three cases an anti-Aristotelian position can also be perceived, which can be further understood as anti-scholastic, or at least as an anti-scholastic interpretation of Dionysius<sup>1</sup>. Likewise there is a particularly deep radicalization of Neoplatonism, the source of all the major ideas in Nicholas of Cusa.

For Nicholas of Cusa, Dionysius was the Areopagite, that is the Greek convert to the Christian faith who is mentioned in the account of Paul's speech on the Areopagus. For that reason, from time immemorial the Dionysian writings—*De caelesti et ecclesiastica hierarchia*, *De divinis nominibus*, *De mystica theologia*, *Epistolae*—had enjoyed the same authority as the Pauline letters, certainly until Lorenzo Valla revealed their true historical context, which was subsequently confirmed by the historico-critical method. What, however, brings Nicholas of Cusa close to being one of the great historians of philosophy is the fact that he recognized the proximity of the Dionysian writings to the thought of Proclus, which is to say that by his own lights he recognized Proclus as a follower of Dionysius.<sup>2</sup> This explains the conviction of Nicholas of Cusa, at first sight so outlandish, that Jesus and Proclus had taught the same thing.<sup>3</sup> Hence too, it is easy to understand—as K. Flasch has rightly noted—that for Nicholas of Cusa there is no theology divorced from philosophy, i.e. no divorce between philosophy and revealed theology. In this respect he continues a long tradition which encompasses the 'Christian philosophy' of the first twelve centuries after Christ, and also the thought of Meister Eckhart<sup>4</sup>.

## COMPLICATIO AND EXPLICATIO

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Wherever use is made of them, the paired ideas of 'complication' and 'explication' refer to a principle of thought, which is applicable in many connections. It has become

particular well-known through the thought of Nicholas of Cusa, but Nicholas himself leans on the philosophy of the school of Chartres, in particular Thierry of Chartres and Clarenbald of Arras, where this pairing has a momentous ontological significance<sup>5</sup>.

Nicholas, however, is patently aware that this principle of thought is of Neoplatonic origin. He appeals from time to time in this connection to Dionysius the Areopagite, even if he does not cite him verbatim, but on the other hand never to Proclus<sup>6</sup>. Nicholas traces back even his master-doctrine to Dionysius: God is the complication, the enfolding of all being, i.e. he is in an intellectual manner which complicates all, and is equally the 'unfolded', i.e. the Creator of all<sup>7</sup>. God is in this sense all and equally 'none of all', in other words all when he complicates and none of all when he explicates<sup>8</sup>. This complicative divine oneness is of a particular kind, for it is wholly without differentiation, in contrast to intellectual complication, in which the contradictory opposites are sublated, and also in contrast to rational complicative oneness, in which the contrary opposites are united<sup>9</sup>. One can term this a special kind of 'holism', for which Nicholas can rightly appeal to Dionysius but not to Proclus<sup>10</sup>.

Furthermore, *Complicatio* is a designation not for a determinate principle, but for one that is ontologically all-pervasive. Hence, for example, even the 'posse fieri', that is matter as the created potentiality, can be conceived as that which contains in itself all that is 'confused' and complicative, and which later appears in explicated form. For this too Nicholas appeals to Dionysius<sup>11</sup>. Thus we should think of God and the world in Nicholas as a graduated succession of enfolding and unfolding. The more enfolded and united something is, the more complicative it is as well. God, however, is the most enfolded and the most united, and therefore is also the 'complicatio complicationum'<sup>12</sup>. But the point too is another such complicated oneness, as is the 'rest', which enfolds movement.

A particular status belongs to the rational soul in humans. For it is the complicative power which encloses in itself all conceivable enfoldings, the one together with the point, rest together with presence<sup>13</sup>. While the concept of 'Soul' signifies the life-principle in its functional contrast with the body, the spirit, that is the mind or intellect, is the 'substantial form' or the complicative power which is proper to soul<sup>14</sup>. Spirit, as complicative oneness, is marked out above all the other forms of enfolding: in other words, as God is the 'enfolding of enfoldings', so spirit, as the image of God, is the image rather than the explication of the unfolding of unfoldings, and as such is also the enfolding of all images<sup>15</sup>. For the 'explication is always inferior to the image of complication'<sup>16</sup>. Next in succession to this is the multiplicity of things, which represents the explication of divine complication: as number, for example, represents the explication of oneness, movement the explication of rest, time the explication of presence or the now, and as magnitude is the explication of the point, diversity that of identity, dissection that of simplicity, etc.<sup>17</sup>.

## Complicatio and Explicatio in Neoplatonism

The opposition between the complicative and the explicative is in fact also a thought-model for Neoplatonism. Indeed, one should say rather that it is *the* Neoplatonic thought-model. As concerns the terminology, W. Beierwaltes and T. Leinkauf have pointed out

that there is a correspondence with Greek: in Plotinus and Proclus 'perilambanein' or 'periechein' stands for *complicatio*, 'exelittein' for *explicatio*<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, one must consider that this correspondence is not exact, since the concept of 'periechein' points to a peculiar, equally Neoplatonic tradition, which has gone on developing right up to the 'Periechontologie' of Karl Jaspers. In the strictest sense *complicatio* and *explicatio* correspond to the Greek expressions 'symptyssein' and 'anaptysssein' respectively. For the latter 'elissein' or 'exelissein' is very often a perfectly suitable equivalent. While this conception was only sparingly employed in the infancy of Neoplatonism, and also in Christian Neoplatonism (as for example by Origen), it crystallized in later Neoplatonism into a terminology according to which 'enfolding' and 'unfolding' came to be understood as universal ontological principles, but also as epistemological or logical principles (as discursive explications of a 'theory' or a 'name')<sup>19</sup>. Enfolding and unfolding are henceforth the semantic symbols for Neoplatonic monism.

For Dionysius, too, the thought of enfolding and unfolding is a universal principle, even if the fundamental ontological meaning is to be derived from the texts of Proclus rather than those of Dionysius. For Dionysius the employment of this principle is especially typical of the activity of metaphysics, as Dionysius understands his teaching as metaphysics in the sense of '*epopteia*' or 'mystagogy'. Clement of Alexandria had already equated the *epopteia* stemming from middle Platonism with (Aristotelian) metaphysics. In the time of Proclus *epopteia* or 'mystagogy' was the generally current name for metaphysics. Proclus himself, and equally his student Hermias and his contemporary Hierocles, sometimes understand their own teaching in this way<sup>20</sup>. For Proclus, and for Neoplatonism in general, Plato's *Parmenides* was the most metaphysical (*epoptikôtaton*) of all dialogues<sup>21</sup>.

Dionysius distinguished two modes of theology, that is of metaphysics. One is the mystical mode, the other the public one; one the symbolic and liturgical, the other the philosophical and demonstrative, so that the sayable and the unsayable are bound together. The sayable, i.e. philosophical metaphysics, undertakes to convince with words and establish the truth of what is said, whereas the unsayable, i.e. mystical theology, is something practical, which has its foundation in God through the 'unteachable mystagogy'<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, it is above all the 'practice of contrariety', that is the handling of the divine names which represents metaphysics, that is expressly understood by Dionysius as an unfolding of something enfolded<sup>23</sup>. More specifically, it is only the aforementioned philosophic theology, or metaphysics, that must be understood as such an explication of an original oneness, whereas mystical union, as the other part of theology, opens up that which is not unfolded.<sup>24</sup>

Dionysius, however, expressly understood the whole world of being as an unfolding of divine oneness. For the first principle is defined as love, albeit in the sense of Eros which comprehends all things in itself in a complicative manner<sup>25</sup>. Complicative love, ontologically speaking, is kind of 'Force' and accordingly a kind of 'Potentiality' (Dynamis), which moves out from absolute Good to the extremities of being and back again in a kind of circular course. This movement of Eros is understood as its 'explication' (De div.



nom. p. 162,5: *anelittomenê*). Dionysius says of the erotic 'Force', which complicatively encompasses all actuality in itself, that, being absolutely transcendent, it is 'ecstatic', and yet without going out of itself<sup>26</sup>. The technical term for this is the word '*anekphoitêtôn*'<sup>27</sup>. Dionysius accepted the meaning of this concept from the later Neoplatonists<sup>28</sup>. Taking his thought as a whole, this ecstatic character of complicative love and its 'not going out of itself' are things that Dionysius has already sought to clarify in an earlier passage of his work. When God, the superessential, communicates being to beings and brings forth essences in their entirety, the One itself makes itself many by this bringing forth of the many from itself—so that, as one says, it becomes *hen on* [existing as one]—without going out of itself and losing its character as a one<sup>29</sup>. Sometimes the concept of 'not going out of itself' (*anekphoitêtôn*) is also juxtaposed with that of the 'hidden' (*kryphion*). The process of explication being understood in this way, this means that Neoplatonism, pagan no less than Christian, understood this process not only as the outgoing of something that remains but also as the 'appearance' of something 'hidden'<sup>30</sup>.

Thus we must conceive the unfolding of complicative oneness as the extension of 'simple potentiality', that is of complicative love through its self-initiated activities (for instance providence and care) to the very extremities of being, and its return thence back to the Good, that is, to itself<sup>31</sup>. It is the thought of complicative oneness and its unfolding into multiplicity that represents the peculiar basis of Neoplatonic monism. From this Nicholas of Cusa concluded that God is equally 'all and nothing', he is 'complicatively all and explicatively none of all' ('in the mode of enfolding [God] is all things but that in the mode of unfolding. He is not any of these things')<sup>32</sup>.

A glance at the philosophy of Proclus and Damascius confirms this. Proclus understands the business of philosophy also as a kind of explication, though in quite another sense than the one understood by Dionysius. According to Proclus, it is the task of philosophy in Plato's sense of discovering the truth signified in myth. What is hidden in the obscurity of myth is legitimately 'unfolded' by philosophical means<sup>33</sup>. So philosophy has, as in Dionysius, an explicatory character. Behind it stands the ontological principle of enfolding and unfolding. Proclus regarded both as two modes of being of the same thing. He says: that which in the one is unitary and complicative, is that which appears in explicative form in the bringing forth from the one<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, however, this means that every division, every disjunction, every distinction, every opposition, every explication presupposes a complicative oneness<sup>35</sup>.

The Neoplatonic hypostases are the result of an unfolding. Already Plotinus accords to spirit the capacity for self-unfolding, that is the unfolding into the intelligibles whereby multiplicity comes into being. Proclus adopted this thought and completed it by saying that soul unfolds spirit<sup>36</sup>. More precisely, he speaks of discursive *logoi*, the 'collections and divisions', that is the propositions which must be regarded as unfoldings of that which is known by intuition<sup>37</sup>.

In Damascius also the thought-model of enfolding and unfolding serves to render intelligible the emergence of the many from the one. As the circle is folded together in the centre, so also the 'unified' (*henômenon*) complicatively contains the whole sum of that which is divided, correspondingly the centre itself and that which is enfolded in the



centre are present in a simple manner in the one.<sup>38</sup> The unified is neither a one nor a many, but 'a nature', which complicatively contains the one and the many in itself<sup>39</sup>. The concept of the complicative also plays a major role in speculation about the totality<sup>40</sup>.

Finally, to make clear the universality of this principle of enfolding, let us point out some other contexts in which it plays a determining role. The school of Ammonius developed a doctrine of concepts and propositions in connection with the *Categories* and *On Interpretation* of Aristotle. In this connection Simplicius conceives the 'name' as the enfolding of the definition<sup>41</sup>. In the domain of epistemology also, the principle of enfolding/unfolding acquires a great significance. According to this, spirit contains in a simple manner that which is unfolded by the 'reasoning soul', but even the reasoning—that is, the discursive—soul can capture in a single vision the premises and syllogisms which represent the unfolded form of knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

## The Complicative and the Potential

Now that we have seen that Nicholas of Cusa's model of complicative enfolding and its unfolding has not only a theological application, but a general ontological and logical, and thus universal significance for all areas of life and thought, we must now point out the epoch-making transformation of ontology which is inherent in this model. It concerns the concept of potentiality. For the complicative is in a certain sense the potential. Quite often Nicholas uses both concepts, as it were, in a single breath. His expression for the potential is 'posse' or 'posse ipsum'<sup>43</sup>. S. Meier-Oeser, who has given us the best book on Nicholas of Cusa, has undertaken a thorough inquiry into his concept of potentiality. The result is in two respects significant: Nicholas' concept of potentiality has nothing to do with scholastic thought, neither with the doctrine of possibility nor with the Thomistic doctrine of *potentia*, nor with the Aristotelian concept of potentiality which excludes actuality. The idea of potentiality to which he gives currency—and this is the second remarkable aspect—is that in the state of Possess (*posse est*) the complicative oneness is actual but equally encloses in itself, as *posse ipse*, all the forms of knowing and hence of potentiality<sup>44</sup>. Thus the potential which is spoken of here transcends the Aristotelian distinction between potentiality and reality, being rather itself a reality in the sense of that which is actual<sup>45</sup>. And so the complicative does not exclude the actual, but is itself a form of it<sup>46</sup>. 'Absolute Possibility [is] above activity and passivity, above the possibility-to-make [i.e. the power-to-make] and the possibility-to-be-made. And you conceive of this [Absolute] Possibility as actually existing.'<sup>47</sup>

All that can exist in any wise is complicatively enfolding in this supreme principle. Indeed he declares expressly in *De docta ignorantia* that divine providence complicatively hides in itself not only that which happens, but also that which does not happen but might happen<sup>48</sup>. In other passages God's omnipotence is conceived as the complicative oneness of all potentiality<sup>49</sup>. The constellation of concepts is thus to be understood as follows: God is prior to the reality which, in Aristotle's sense, is distinguished from potentiality, but also prior to the potentiality which is distinguishable from reality. Rather he is himself the complicative potentiality, which is not distinguishable from reality<sup>50</sup>.

There is also a potentiality posited by the human intellect as an image of the divine enfolding, inasmuch as all 'likenesses', that is all concepts, are contained in him in a virtual manner, while explication proceeds through approximation to the things, and this is what is called cognition<sup>51</sup>. The complicative potential bears the mark of absolute priority. It precedes, and is therefore not conditioned by, any polarities, even being and not-being. Apart from it, therefore, nothing can exist or be known. And conversely this means, 'whatever things are able either to exist or to be known are enfolded in Capability itself and are of it'<sup>52</sup>.

The origin of this thought of complicative potentiality, which is equally the highest form of actual being, is very much in debate among researchers. S. Meier-Oeser has rightly rejected all theories that would bring into play Aristotelian scholastic speculations on potentiality.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, he himself does not point to any possible historical antecedents.

Whatever course the history of the concept of potentiality may have taken in individual cases, at all events the Neoplatonic reinterpretation of the Aristotelian concept of *dynamis* must be considered as the backdrop to Nicholas of Cusa's postulation of complicative potentiality. Plotinus has given us sufficient proof of this. For the One as the 'principle of all' necessarily has the character of potentiality. Plotinus expressly distances himself in this passage from the Aristotelian concept of potentiality, which signifies the merely receptive or passive function of matter. The *dynamis pantôn* of the One, on the other hand, is just as much a pure actuality which does what it does with necessity, properly understood<sup>54</sup>. Plotinus also already perceived the universal priority of this principle, which we have encountered in connection with the philosophy of Nicholas. Therefore the locution '*dynamis tôn pantôn*' also means '*pro tôn pantôn*', i.e. the complicative potential is prior to all and apart from it all would be nothing<sup>55</sup>. To see what constitutes the determination of the content of potentiality, there is of course need of 'spirit' to apprehend the intelligible determinations, in whereby it attains a distance from the One's confused and complicative sphere of potentiality<sup>56</sup>. Thus far the Neoplatonic interpretation of the concept of potentiality.

The complicative character of divine being is recognized, and indeed plainly enunciated, by Thierry of Chartres: that 'God is the enfolding of all things in simplicity', who was consequently styled 'absolute necessity' by the 'ancients', is a proposition that appears with increasing frequency in his work<sup>57</sup>. What, on the other hand, is not to be reckoned Neoplatonic is the thought that matter also, which Thierry (in common with Alan of Lille) styles 'absolute potentiality', has a complicative character<sup>58</sup>.

The complicative oneness of God's simplicity must naturally be distinguished from the complicative oneness of matter, which means that of primordial matter or chaos. Wherein lies the distinction? The complicative simplicity of God is the changeless, i.e. necessary fulness of things which is anterior to creation, and which appears as 'ordering' and 'progression'<sup>59</sup>. The complicative universe of 'absolute potentiality', i.e. of primordial matter, on the other hand, is the absolutely anarchic, the changeable itself, that which slips hither and thither<sup>60</sup>. Nevertheless Cusanus describes this notion of 'absolute potentiality' as a thesis of 'the ancients'<sup>61</sup>. The '*posse fieri*', of which he speaks particularly, but not only, in *De venatione sapientiae*, bears on the one hand a certain resemblance to the

‘primordial matter’ of tradition, especially insofar as it is understood as ‘passive potency’ and as ‘absolute capacity for becoming’<sup>62</sup>, but in the other hand it is distinguished from it. For it is nothing in the order of creation, being ‘haphazard and indeterminate’, yet in the divine preconception it already possesses a structure and a direction to a goal<sup>63</sup>.

Whatever traditional doctrine of creation the thought of *posse fieri* is to be deduced from, its peculiar function consists in this, that as the opposing concept it witnesses to the active character of the complicative divine potentiality.

## DOCTA IGNORANTIA

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It is also with regard to his teaching on ‘docta ignorantia’ that Nicholas of Cusa links himself to Dionysius. Dionysius sought in ‘numerous ways’ to show that God can be discovered only on the principle of knowing unknowing<sup>64</sup>. From time to time, along with Dionysius he also appeals to Augustine and the Arabic philosopher Algazel.<sup>65</sup> Thereby they all took a way that was new in antiquity, for the ancients were not acquainted with the principle of knowing unknowing<sup>66</sup>. Nicholas criticizes the ancient philosophers on the grounds that they claimed to be able supply a basis for the essence of things without considering the essence of God, which at the same time, however, they alleged to be knowable and already known. To this end they made useless efforts ‘since they have not entered into the field of learned ignorance’<sup>67</sup>. The knowledge of unknowing is nothing other than the knowledge that one can know nothing of God<sup>68</sup>. This is perhaps the most important aspect of *docta ignorantia*, that it is a reflexive knowledge, as Nicholas indeed maintained against his critic Wenck: ‘... quod se sciat ignorare’, (‘That [someone] knows that he does not know’)<sup>69</sup>. Learned ignorance therefore is above all, in the Socratic sense, the knowledge of unknowing<sup>70</sup>.

It is consequently the task of knowing unknowing to make us aware that in the domain of the ‘more and less’, that is in the creaturely realm, no absolute greatest or smallest can be attained<sup>71</sup>.

An important and specific aspect of Nicholas’ concept of knowing unknowing is that its object is not God alone. He stresses explicitly that only with the help of unknowing knowing can one arrive at the anti-Peripatetic thesis (on which we touched earlier) of the impossibility of the existence of an ‘absolute potentiality’, i.e. of primordial matter<sup>72</sup>.

Dionysius conceived the doctrine of knowing unknowing as the subjective completion of his objective negative theology. Negative theology itself is already an ‘ascent bynegations’ (d.n. XIII 3; 230,1). Not only, therefore, is God nothing that can be apprehended by our sense-bound faculties, but he is also beyond all that spirit can contain. He is also ‘the supergood, the superdivine, the superessential, the supervital, the superwise, and whatever pertains to supereminent abstraction’. Likewise he is the ground of all that is good, all that is divine, all that is vital, ‘superessentially the superoriginal origin of every origin’<sup>73</sup>. At the same time, however, the essence of God cannot be grasped through negative predications. It stands on neither side of the

polarities formulated by the human spirit. Thus God, according to Dionysius, is not only beyond all cognition and in this sense incognizable but also the 'superincognizable' or superinexpressible<sup>74</sup>.

This is beyond the power of our sensory and imaginative faculties, beyond discursive thought (Logos) and the intuitive grasp of reason, and so beyond speech also. The one commensurate mode of worship therefore is silence. Here there can be no talk of cognition in the proper sense of cognizing a given thing as that given thing. Awareness of God through the '*unio mystica*' means rather being led 'into the truly mystical darkness of unknowing'<sup>75</sup>. The concept of the darkness or cloud of unknowing that Dionysius employs here is a striking peculiarity, which is readopted in Nicholas' concept of '*caligo*' (mist, darkness) or '*tenebrae*' (shadows). For while, as a whole, the Dionysian doctrine of learned unknowing is otherwise in accord with the spirit of pagan Neoplatonism in the form of Proclus; philosophy, the notion of a 'cloud' of such unknowing in no way corresponds with this species of Neoplatonism. It seems rather that here the one who stands in the background is Gregory of Nyssa whom we ought perhaps to regard as a forerunner of the Dionysian critique of the possibility of knowing the essence.<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the power of producing particular acts of cognition, *unio mystica*, in which—as Dionysius says—the divine is 'undergone' or 'suffered',<sup>77</sup> is a non-cognition, a kind of unknowing, which at the same time is the highest knowledge in the sense of enfolding. In the mystical union the human spirit experiences 'mystical vision', yet the one who has this vision is united with the 'totally unknowable', and is able only through 'non-perception and non-cognition to see and know that which is beyond seeing and knowledge' (m.t. I 1, 2; p. 141–143). As can be seen, negative theology on the objective side corresponds to knowing unknowing on the subjective side. We can apprehend it as a kind of negative gnoseology.

Dionysius was led to this doctrine of that which stands above contradictory polarities once he had granted a certain truth to Aristotle's epistemology. Perhaps that position is true, says Dionysius, which assumes that, starting with the order of the universe and with images and analogies, we are led through abstraction from all to the cause of all so that one is cognizant of God 'in all' and 'separate from all'. One cannot, however, take a permanent stand here. As a matter of fact, as the Aristotelians would say, it is possible to arrive at some apprehension of God through spirit, through understanding, through knowledge, through contact, through perception, through conjecture, through imaging, through naming etc., but in these ways he is not cognized, expressed, or known. For the proper, the divine cognition of God is by non-knowing, that is through the union which transcends spirit, in which the spirit comes to a place beyond all beings, abandoning itself to unite itself with the radiance of God. Thus Dionysius can sum up this kind of cognition as follows: 'God is cognized as much through knowing as through unknowing'<sup>78</sup>.

While Dionysius understands unknowing in the sense of Plotinian union through self-abandonment etc., Nicholas of Cusa plainly reverts to a cognitive-intellectual context. Learned unknowing is the setting of oneself above all discursive thought, and indeed as he says with the help of his mentor Augustine, the passing of judgement from a superior height upon the discursive, i.e. that which is not in the proper sense known<sup>79</sup>.

Learned unknowing is a knowledge of non-knowing. This knowledge, being 'learned' can have distinct gradations<sup>80</sup>. It is reflexive judgement carried to its conclusion<sup>81</sup>. The content of this judgement cannot but be the same thing in every case. Nicholas stipulates, as the 'root' of learned unknowing, 'that God cannot be known as He is'<sup>82</sup>. For all that, however, according to Nicholas the threefold character of God is cognizable through learned unknowing<sup>83</sup>.

## ‘DE NON ALIUD’—A FUNDAMENTAL DIONYSIAN IDEA

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Finally the influence of Dionysius is observable to an extreme degree in Nicholas of Cusa's late work, *De non aliud*. This work appeared in Rome at the beginning of 1462. The intellectual setting of this discourse is subtle and significant: the participants are the Abbot of St Iustina in Secadium (now Sezze), Andreas Vigerius, who had worked on Proclus, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, Petrus Balbus, who had translated the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus into Latin, Ferdinand Matim, the Aristotelian, and finally Nicholas of Cusa, whose knowledge of and familiarity with Dionysius are emphasized at the outset. The discourse is for the most part a dialogue between Nicholas and Ferdinand, that is a confrontation between the Christian philosophy, which rests on the basis of Dionysian thought, and Aristotelianism.

Reference is made to Dionysius on a broader front. The fourteenth chapter consists almost entirely of citations from Dionysius. Besides, Nicholas had also fully perceived the closeness in content of the Dionysian corpus to the work of Proclus, of course without arguing yet for the chronological priority of the latter<sup>84</sup>. Amid these references to Dionysius it is now expressly noted that even Nicholas' idea of the '*Non aliud*' is to be traced back to Dionysius<sup>85</sup>. Nicholas refers particularly to Dionysius' book, the *Mystical Theology*, where the thought appears only incidentally, though in similar terminology ('creatorem neque aliud quid esse')<sup>86</sup>.

What is peculiar about this idea, and why is it such a shocking blow to Aristotelianism?

On closer inspection, the Aristotelian element turns out to be an anti-scholastic one, insofar as it is the scholastic doctrine of transcendence that here becomes the object of criticism, or undergoes a relativization.<sup>87</sup> Once the non-other is stated at the beginning of the dialogue to be the true definition of things and the transcendent source from which they receive their determinate being, it is the Aristotelian Ferdinand who is surprised that the One, Being, the True, and the Good should be ontologically posterior to the not-other. Nicholas explains in what way the scholastic thesis of the transcendent as the first principle of reality and the first object of knowledge betrays a one-sided view of things. For the One—the transcendent One of the scholastic tradition no less than the One of the Neoplatonic tradition—has the appearance of being an Other over against the not-One. But therefore it cannot lead to the first spring of all, since this does not

stand in opposition to anything, and on this account Nicholas gave it the name not-other<sup>88</sup>. Thus the not-other is that which, in grounding everything, transcends it, but in such a way that at the same time it is present in it even when it is set in opposition to it. One must say likewise of the True and the Good. The relation of the not-other to the transcendental determinations which logically and ontologically follow it is therefore to be conceived as the Aristotelian Ferdinand sums it up: 'If I understand you rightly, Not-other is seen before all things in such way that it cannot be absent from any of the things which are seen after it, even if these things are contradictories'<sup>89</sup>. The not-other operates in things, as Nicholas expresses himself with a term of art, by way of a not-othering (*non-aliare*)<sup>90</sup>. One must therefore learn to conceive the not-other as an essential element of all things, all beings, and even indeed of all that is thinkable. Without it nothing can exist or be known. Indeed even the contradictory opposite of this, not-existing and not-knowing, is impossible without it. 'This fact is true to such an extent that if I tried to view nothing itself and ignorance itself apart from Not-other, I would try altogether in vain. For how is nothing nothing-visible except through Not-other, so that nothing is not other than nothing?'<sup>91</sup>. It is related in the same way to not-knowing and everything else. 'For everything which exists exists insofar as it is not other [than itself]'. The not-other is thus the ground of all that exists, and of all that is some determinate thing and hence an other set over against an other. If something moves, it is the not-other that determines the fact of its moving, and if it rests the fact of its resting; if something lives, it is the ground of the fact that it lives.

Although the not-other is contained in everything in its own way, it remains completely distinguishable from it. Here the peculiar ontological position of the not-other becomes apparent. Even where otherness is, the not-other already plays a constitutive role. This is stated in the proposition that 'Other itself is nothing other than the other'. Thus the world is not other than the world, and that is correspondingly true for all that is possible, i.e. namable: all is what it is, nothing other than itself<sup>92</sup>. In the domain of otherness there is nothing that must not be traced back to the not-other as its own immanent conditioning ground. But if this immanent ground is withdrawn from the not-other, then the other does not remain either. For if the other is to remain at all, then must it be nothing other than the other<sup>93</sup>.

Nicholas of Cusa warns us indeed to understand the not-other simply as identity in the domain of otherness. For the identical too is nothing other than the identical, so that the not-other precedes the identical also and makes it possible. In the domain of otherness all that is identical has in some measure its not-other as the conditioning ground of its identity in itself. Thus that not-other whereby the sun exists as such, that is in its otherness, is not the not-other *simpliciter*, but the 'solar' (solare) not-other, as it were the not-other tailored to the identity of the sun<sup>94</sup>.

From the not-other in the sense of an ontological principle one must distinguish, if not indeed sunder, that not-other which has the name God<sup>95</sup>. This is the not-other which is identical to everything, that is which precedes everything, which nevertheless is not identical with any other. For this reason Johannes Wenck's accusation of pantheism is wide of the mark<sup>96</sup>. From this divine not-other all things that are distinguished from



one another receive their specific identity<sup>97</sup>. The divine not-other, because it is before every other, cannot be any other. Rather it is everything that can exist at all. For this reason it can also be styled the not-other *simpliciter*<sup>98</sup>. For everything outside him, that is all that can be thought or said, has its opposite and is an other over against this. 'But because God is not other than [any] other, He is Not-other, although Not-other and other seem to be opposed.'

The basic reason for this is that the other, over against the source of otherness (namely, the not-other), is not something opposed. This is the sense in which one must understand the teaching of the theologians (meaning Dionysius in particular), that God is all in all, although he is none of all<sup>99</sup>.

Nicholas of Cusa also draws epistemological consequences from this ontological dependence of the other upon the not-other. If the not-other makes possible every opposite by its existence, that must be equally true for the act of cognition itself. So too the seeing, no less than the non-seeing, of the spirit are impossible without it. This also means, on the other hand, that the not-other is cognized as much through seeing as through not-seeing. And quite necessarily. For if both the spirit's seeing and its not-seeing—insofar as both are nothing other than they are—are not possible without the non-other, 'then Not-other cannot fail to be seen—just as what is known through knowledge and through ignorance cannot fail to be known'<sup>100</sup>.

This means that at the very beginning the not-other is the prerogative of spirit, before all concrete knowing and unknowing. The not-other is in this sense presupposed and cognized in all cognition. Yet that which is concretely cognized is not any other over against it, but the uncognized itself, which in a certain cognizable way is reflected in the object of cognition.

Your mind now sees accurately and clearly (1) that Not-other is presupposed and known in every cognition and (2) that what is known is not other than Not-other but is Not-other-qua-un-known, which shines forth knowably in what is known. (By comparison, in the visible colors of the rainbow, the clarity of perceptibly invisible sunlight shines forth visibly in various ways in various clouds)<sup>101</sup>.

No other person in the tradition had made this so clear as Dionysius the Areopagite. The more laudable Dionysius' contribution is in the eyes of Nicholas of Cusa, the harsher is his critique of Aristotle.

The Philosopher held it to be most certain that an affirmation contradicts a negation and that both cannot at the same time be said of the same thing, since they are contradictories. He said this on the basis of reason's concluding it to be true. But if someone had asked Aristotle, 'What is other?' he surely could have answered truly, 'It is not other than other.' And, if the questioner had thereupon added, 'Why is other other?' Aristotle could rightly have answered as at first, 'Because it is not other than other.' And thus, he would have seen that Not-other and other do not contradict each other as contradictories. And he would have seen that that to which he gives the name 'the first principle' (*primum principium*) does not suffice for showing the way to the truth which the mind contemplates beyond reasoning<sup>102</sup>.



The historical significance of this critique of Aristotle cannot be overestimated. Nicholas says here with particular emphasis, in the writing *De non aliud*, that the principle of contradiction is in no way the universal principle that Aristotle supposed it to be. If the other is an other, this is also the reason why it is nothing other than the other. The not-other is also a constituent of the otherness of the other. Thus for Nicholas the other and the not-other are to be distinguished, but they do not stand over against each other in the sense of the Aristotelian principle of contradiction. Under the rubric of the not-other something is cognized here that escapes the Aristotelian principle of contradiction.

## NOTES

1. See K. Flasch, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 108 and 137. As H. G. Senger, 'Die Präferenz' has shown, the reception of Dionysius in an anti-scholastic direction in Nicholas of Cusa corresponds to a general intellectual tendency in the philosophy of the Renaissance.
2. See Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c.12, n. 64, p. 62: Proclus vero, qui Origenem allegat, post Dionysium venit. On this see especially W. Beierwaltes, 'Der verborgene Gott', pp. 130–134; also T. Kobusch, 'Dionysius Areopagita', pp. 84–98.
3. See Nicholas of Cusa, *De principio*, n. 6–7, p. 6–7.
4. See K. Flasch, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 138–140. On the other hand W. Beierwaltes' position in 'Das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Theologie bei Cusanus', which attempts to mediate between the philosophic and the theological understanding of Nicholas' work, is rather confusing. Nicholas, like the whole patristic tradition, has simply no notion of a theology of revelation divorced from philosophy. Even one who distinguishes 'faith' from 'knowledge' and deems this superior to 'the philosophy of understanding and reason' (S.147) does not thereby become a theologian of revelation, but rather reveals the influence of the Victorine conception of philosophy. Because Nicholas of Cusa and Renaissance philosophy are completely ignorant of the scholastic distinction between philosophy and theology, they make a contribution to the rehabilitation of natural reason. On the tradition see T. Kobusch, *Christliche Philosophie*.
5. See G. von Bredow, *Complicatio/explicatio*, and also the very instructive chapter on the theme of enfolding in Leinkauf, *Nicolaus Cusanus. Eine Einführung*, pp. 102–110.
6. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n. 46, pp. 31–32: Neque intelligit adversarius, quid sit theologia, neque quid impugnet, neque quid allegat. Nam cum habeatur in Docta ignorantia, quomodo 'Deus non istud quidem est et aliud non est, sed est omnia et nihil omnium' —'quae sunt verba sancti Dionysii—, dicit hoc contradictionem in se habere 'esse omnia et nihil omnium' et non intelligit, quomodo est complicative omnia et nihil omnium explicative. Et cum non habeat aliquid de intellectu, ridet, quando legit ponderosissima verba, nesciens illa esse sanctorum et per eum, qui doctam ignorantiam explanavit, adducta, ut secundum doctrinam sancti Dionysii non exiret terminos sanctorum. Sermo LXXI, n. 9, p. 427: Omnia enim in tantum sunt, in quantum unum sunt, ut ait Boethius De unitate et uno. Et absolute unum est omnia uniter, ut ait Dionysius circa finem De divinis nominibus. Complicat enim omnia ut causa. Sermo CCXXXV, n. 6, p. 196: In omni re Dionysius ponit essentiam, virtutem et operationem. In essentia complicatur virtus et operatio. Nominat autem Dionysius essentiam ousiam, quam et nos substantiam dicimus.
7. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n. 42, p. 28: Nam cum Deus solum sit complicatio omnis esse cuiuscumque existentis, hinc creando explicavit caelum et terram;

- immo, quia Deus est omnia complicitate modo intellectualiter divino, hinc et omnium explicator, creator, factor et quidquid circa hoc dici potest; sic arguit magnus Dionysius.
8. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n. 46, p. 31.
  9. Nicholas of Cusa, *De coniecturis*, n. 78, p. 77: Coincidentiam igitur complicationis et explicationis rationale caelum ambit. Quare illa rationalis complicatio explicatioque non sunt de his oppositis, quae solum in intellectuali unitate coincidunt. In divina enim complicatione omnia absque differentia coincidunt, in intellectuali contradictoria se compatiuntur, in rationali contraria, ut oppositae differentiae in genere.
  10. The originality of the work of A. Moritz, *Explizite Komplikationen*, consists in his perception of a 'radical holism' on the work of Nicholas of Cusa, which cannot be traced to Proclus, the first theorist of totality, but was constructed in opposition to him.
  11. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 9, n. 23, pp. 24–25: Nam postea id quod actu factum est caelum, scilicet firmamentum, et quod terra factum, scilicet aridam, et quod lux facta est, scilicet solem iuxta Dionysium, expressit. Omnia enim in posse fieri confuse et complicitate creata, quae postea facta et explicata leguntur.
  12. Nicholas of Cusa, *Dialogus de ludo globi*, n. 86, p. 105: Nam vis complicativa est in simplicitate, quae quanto magis unita tanto magis simplex et complicativa. Ideo deus, qui est vis, qua nulla maior esse potest, est vis maxime unita et simplex; quare maxime potens et complicans. Igitur est complicatio complicationum.
  13. Nicholas of Cusa, *Dialogus de ludo globi*, n. 92, pp. 114–115: Unde anima rationalis est vis complicativa omnium notionalium complicationum. Complicat enim complicationem multitudinis et complicationem magnitudinis, scilicet unius et puncti. Nam sine illis, scilicet multitudine et magnitudine, nulla fit discretio. Complicat complicationem motuum, quae complicatio quies dicitur. Nihil enim in motu nisi quies videtur. Motus est enim de quiete in quietem. Complicat etiam complicationem temporis, quae nunc seu praesentia dicitur. Nihil enim in tempore nisi nunc reperitur. Et ita de omnibus complicationibus dicendum, scilicet quod anima rationalis est simplicitas omnium complicationum notionalium.
  14. Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* n. 80, p. 122: Unde mens est forma substantialis sive vis in se omnia suo modo complicans, ...
  15. Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* n. 73, p. 111.
  16. Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* n. 158, p. 216.
  17. Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente*, p. 114: Sicut enim deus est complicationum complicatio, sic mens, quae est dei imago, est imago complicationis complicationum. Post imagines sunt pluralitates rerum divinam complicationem explicantes, sicut numerus est explicativus unitatis et motus quietis et tempus aeternitatis et composition simplicitatis et tempus praesentiae et magnitudo puncti et inaequalitas aequalitatis et diversitas identitatis et ita de singulis.
  18. W. Beierwaltes, 'Identität und Differenz', p. 149; T. Leinkauf, *Nicolaus Cusanus. Eine Einführung*, p. 103.
  19. See e.g. Proclus, *In rem publ.* I 294; *Theol. Plat.* I, p. 8; I, p. 13; III p. 33; IV, p. 8; IV, p. 76; In Parm. 705,7, I 102; 740,15, I 143. Damascius, *De principiis* II, p. 52; III, p. 35.
  20. *Hermiae Alexandrini in Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, p. 186, 11: οὐ γὰρ ἀπλῶς ἡ θεὰ ἐστὶν ἡ μακαριωτάτη· ὁ γὰρ ὁρῶν ὡς ἄλλος ἄλλο ὁρᾷ, δεῖ δὲ καὶ ἔνωσιν γενέσθαι· ἡ ἐνιδρυσις οὖν εἴη ἂν ἡ μακαριωτάτη. ... τὸ δὲ τῆς ἐποπτείας τὸ ἐνιδρυθῆναι αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐπόπτην αὐτῶν γενέσθαι. See Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne* III 7, eds H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, Paris 1978, pp. 29, 7–8: ἡμῖν ἐπαναληπτέον τὴν περὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς μυσταγωγίαν, ...

Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne* III, pp. 23, 83, 14–17: ὥ δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς τῇ θείᾳ κεφαλῇ περὶ τὴν τοῦ Παρμενίδου θεωρίαν συνεβακχεύσαμεν, τὰς ἱερὰς ἀτραπούς ταύτας καὶ πρὸς τὴν μυσταγωγίαν τὴν ἀπόρρητον ἀτεχνῶς καθεύδοντας ἡμᾶς ἀνεγειρούσας ἐκφαίνοντος.

*Théologie Platonicienne* I 5, eds H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, Paris 1968, 24, 12–17: Εἰ δὲ δεῖ τοὺς μάλιστα τὴν περὶ θεῶν μυσταγωγίαν ἡμῖν ἐκφαίνοντας τῶν πολλῶν προθεῖναι διαλόγων, οὐκ ἂν φθάνοιμι τόν τε Φαίδωνα καὶ τὸν Φαῖδρον ἀπολογιζόμενος καὶ τὸ Συμπόσιον καὶ τὸν Φίληβον, τόν τε αὖ Σοφιστὴν καὶ τὸν Πολιτικὸν μετὰ τούτων καταλέγων καὶ Κρατύλον καὶ Τίμαιον.

21. See Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* I, p. 44: πῶς οὐκ ἀδύνατον ἐν τῇ τῶν πραγματειῶν ἐποπτικωτάτῃ τὴν μὲν τοῦ ἐνὸς ἐξηρημένην αὐτὸν παραδιδόναι διὰ τῆς πρώτης ὑποθέσεως πρὸς ἅπαντα τὰ γένη τῶν ὄντων ὑπεροχὴν καὶ τὸ ὄν αὐτὸ καὶ τὴν ψυχικὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὸ εἶδος εἰ τύχοι καὶ τὴν ὕλην, ὑπὲρ δὲ τῶν θείων προόδων καὶ τῆς ἐν τάξει διακρίσεως αὐτῶν μηδένα πεποισθῆαι λόγον; In *Parm.* p. 617, 16, I 1.: πάντα δὲ ἀπλῶς τὰ θεῖα γένη παρασκευὴν ἐνθεῖναι μοι τελείαν εἰς τὴν μετουσίαν τῆς ἐποπτικωτάτης τοῦ Πλάτωνος καὶ μυστικωτάτης θεωρίας, ἣν ἐκφαίνει μὲν ἡμῖν αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ Παρμενίδῃ μετὰ τῆς προσηκούσης τοῖς πράγμασι βαθύτητος
22. See Dionysius Areopagite, *Epistula* 9,1, p. 197: Ἄλλως τε καὶ τοῦτο ἐννοῆσαι χρή, τὸ διττὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν θεολόγων παράδοσιν, τὴν μὲν ἀπόρρητον καὶ μυστικὴν, τὴν δὲ ἐμφανῆ καὶ γνωριμωτέραν, καὶ τὴν μὲν συμβολικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν, τὴν δὲ φιλόσοφον καὶ ἀποδεικτικὴν· καὶ συμπλέκεται τῷ ῥητῷ τὸ ἄρρητον. Καὶ τὸ μὲν πείθει καὶ καταδεῖται τῶν λεγομένων τὴν ἀλήθειαν, τὸ δὲ δρᾷ καὶ ἐνιδρύει τῷ θεῷ ταῖς ἀδιδάκτοις μυσταγωγίαις. A similar bifurcation in Proclus, *In rem publ.* I 84, 24: οὕτως ἄρα καὶ ἡ μυθολογία διήρηται πρὸς τε τὴν τῶν νέων ὀρθὴν ἀγωγὴν καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἱερατικὴν καὶ συμβολικὴν τοῦ θείου πρόκλησιν. καὶ ἡ μὲν δι' εἰκόνων μέθοδος τοῖς γνησίως φιλοσοφοῦσιν προσήκει, ἡ δὲ δι' ἀπορρήτων συνθημάτων τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἔνδειξις τοῖς τῆς μυστικωτέρας ἡγεμόσιν τελεσιουργίας, ἀφ' ἧς δὴ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Πλάτων πολλὰ τῶν οἰκείων δογμάτων ἀξιῶ πιστότερα καὶ ἐναργέστερα δεικνύναι. δηλοῖ δὲ ἐν Φαίδωνι
23. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* I 1, p. 107,3: Νῦν δέ, ὦ μακάριε, μετὰ τὰς Θεολογικὰς ὑποτυπώσεις ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν θείων ὀνομάτων ἀνάπτυξιν, ὡς ἐφικτόν, μετελεύσομαι. See also *ib.* I 8, p. 121, 4: Νῦν δέ, ὅσα τῆς παρούσης ἐστὶ πραγματείας, ἐκ τῶν λογίων συναγαγόντες καὶ ὥσπερ τινὶ κανόνι τοῖς εἰρημένοις χρώμενοι καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ σκοποῦντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνάπτυξιν τῶν νοητῶν θεωνυμιῶν προῖωμεν καὶ ..., ταῖς τῶν ἱερῶν θεωνυμιῶν ἀναπτύξεσι παραθώμεθα
24. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* II 7, p. 130, 14: Ἀλλὰ τούτων μὲν τῶν ἐνώσεών τε καὶ διακρίσεων, ὅσας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις θεοπρεπεῖς αἰτίας εὐρήκαμεν, ἐν ταῖς Θεολογικαῖς ὑποτυπώσεσιν ἰδίᾳ περὶ ἐκάστου διαλαβόντες, ὡς ἐφικτόν, ἐξεθέμεθα, τὰ μὲν ἀνελίζαντες τῷ ἀληθεῖ λόγῳ καὶ ἀναπτύξαντες καὶ τὸν ἱερὸν καὶ ἀνεπιθόλωτον νοῦν ἐπὶ τὰ φανὰ τῶν λογίων θεάματα προσαγαγόντες, τοῖς δὲ ὡς μυστικοῖς κατὰ τὴν θείαν παράδοσιν ὑπὲρ νοερὰν ἐνέργειαν ἐνωθέντες. On the 'bifurcation' of the theological tradition see *Epist.* 9,1. On this see also T. Kobusch, 'Dionysius Areopagita', in *Klassiker der Religionsphilosophie*, ed. F. Niewöhner, Verlag C. J. Beck, Munich (1995), pp. 84–98.
25. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* IV 16, p. 161, 11: Νῦν αὖθις ἀναλαβόντες ἅπαντας εἰς τὸν ἕνα καὶ συνεπτυγμένον ἔρωτα καὶ πάντων αὐτῶν πατέρα συνελιζόμεν ἅμα καὶ συναγάγωμεν ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν πρῶτον εἰς δύο συναιροῦντες αὐτὸν ἐρωτικὰς καθόλου δυνάμεις, ὧν ἐπικρατεῖ καὶ προκατάρχει πάντως ἡ ἐκ τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα παντὸς ἔρωτος ἄσχετος αἰτία, καὶ πρὸς ἣν ἀνατείνεται συμφυῶς ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων ὁ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ὀλικὸς ἔρως.

26. On Dionysius' conception of love see also W. Beierwaltes, 'Dionysius Areopagites—ein christlicher Proclus?', pp. 73–75.
27. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* IV 13, p. 159, 9: Τολμητέον δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας εἰπεῖν, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πάντων αἴτιος τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ τῶν πάντων ἔρωτι δι' ὑπερβολὴν τῆς ἐρωτικῆς ἀγαθότητος ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται ταῖς εἰς τὰ ὄντα πάντα προνοαῖς καὶ οἷον ἀγαθότητι καὶ ἀγαπήσει καὶ ἔρωτι θέλγεται καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὑπὲρ πάντα καὶ πάντων ἐξηρημένου πρὸς τὸ ἐν πᾶσι κατάγεται κατ' ἐκστατικὴν ὑπερούσιον δύναμιν ἀνεκφοίτητον ἑαυτοῦ.
28. According to Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* III p. 35 'not going forth' in the sense of 'remaining' is not an ontological privilege of the One, but occurs in many contexts. See Syrianus, *In Metaph.*, p.109,24: τὴν δὲ διὰ νοῦ τοῦ ἑαυτῆς, ὅς ἀνεκφοίτητος λοιπὸν ἐστὶ τῶν ἐκεῖ καὶ κρειττόνως ἦνται τοῖς θεοῖς εἶδεν. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* I, p. 57, 2–7: Ὡς γὰρ τὰ σώματα τῇ ἑαυτῶν ζωῇ συνάπτεται πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ ὡς αἱ ψυχαὶ τῷ ἑαυτῶν νοητικῷ πρὸς τὸν ὅλον νοῦν ἀνατείνονται καὶ τὴν πρωτίστην νόησιν, οὕτω δὴπου καὶ τὰ ὄντως ὄντα τῷ ἑαυτῶν ἐνὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐξηρημένην ἔνωσησιν ἀνήκται καὶ ταύτῃ τῆς πρωτίστης αἰτίας ἐστὶν ἀνεκφοίτητα. Damascius, *De principiis* p. 127: ἀλλ' ἡ μία πηγὴ ἀδιάκριτος ἔτι τῶν ἀπ' αὐτῆς διαιρουμένων πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων ὑποστάσεων ρίζα οὖσα ἀνεκφοίτητος τοῦ ἐνός...
29. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* II 11, p. 135, 13: Καὶ ἵνα σαφῶς περὶ πάντων ἐξῆς προδιορισώμεθα, διάκρισιν θεῖαν εἶναι φαμέν, ὡς εἴρηται, τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους. Δωρουμένη γὰρ πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι καὶ ὑπερχέουσα τὰς τῶν ὅλων ἀγαθῶν μετουσίαις ἡνωμένως μὲν διακρίνεται, πληθύνεται δὲ ἐνικῶς καὶ πολλαπλασιάζεται ἐκ τοῦ ἐνός ἀνεκφοιτήτως. Οἷον ἐπειδὴ ὧν ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς ὑπερουσίως, δωρεῖται δὲ τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὖσι καὶ παράγει τὰς ὅλας οὐσίας, πολλαπλασιάζεσθαι λέγεται τὸ ἐν ὃν ἐκεῖνο τῇ ἐξ αὐτοῦ παραγωγῇ τῶν πολλῶν ὄντων μένοντος οὐδὲν ἦττον ἐκείνου καὶ ἐνός ἐν τῷ πληθυσμῷ καὶ ἡνωμένου κατὰ τὴν πρόοδον καὶ πλήρους ἐν τῇ διακρίσει τῷ πάντων εἶναι τῶν ὄντων ὑπερουσίως ἐξηρημένον καὶ τῇ ἐνιαίᾳ τῶν ὅλων προαγωγῇ καὶ τῇ ἀνελαττώτῳ χύσει τῶν ἀμειώτων αὐτοῦ μεταδόσεων.
30. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* p. 126, 7: Καλοῦσι γάρ, ὅπερ καὶ ἐν ἐτέροις ἔφην, οἱ τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς θεολογικῆς παραδόσεως ἱερομύσται τὰς μὲν ἐνώσεις τὰς θείας τὰς τῆς ὑπεραρρήτου καὶ ὑπεραγνώστου μονιμότητος κρυφίας καὶ ἀνεκφοιτήτους ὑπεριδρύσεις, τὰς διακρίσεις δὲ τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους τε καὶ ἐκφάνσεις. See *Epistulae* 3,1: «Ἐξαίφνης» ἐστὶ τὸ παρ' ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐκ τοῦ τέως ἀφανοῦς εἰς τὸ ἐκφανὲς ἐξαγόμενον. Ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν φιλανθρωπίας καὶ τοῦτο οἶμαι τὴν θεολογίαν αἰνίττεσθαι, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ κρυφίου τὸν ὑπερούσιον εἰς τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐμφάνειαν ἀνθρωπικῶς οὐσιωθέντα προεληλυθέναι. See Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* III, p. 46: Καὶ τὸ μὲν κατ' αἰτίαν ἐστὶ πάντα καὶ ὡς πολλάκις εἵπομεν κρυφίως, τὸ δὲ προφαίνει τὸ πλῆθος καὶ πρόεισιν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνώσεως τοῦ ὄντος εἰς ἐκφανσιν, ...  
*In Plat. Parmenidem* 719,18, I 120: τῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς θεοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν κρυφίων εἰς τὰ φαινότατα μεταδόσεως τῶν ἀγαθῶν....
31. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* IV 17, p. 162, 1.
32. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, p. 31. Modelled on Plotinus, *Enn.* III 8,9: οὐδὲν τῶν πάντων.
33. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* V, p. 131f.: Ὁ δὲ γε Πλάτων συγχωρεῖ μὲν τοῖς φοιβολήτοις ποιηταῖς μυστικῶς τὰ τοιαῦτα αἰνίσσεσθαι, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς ἐξείργει τῆς τούτων ἀκροάσεως, τοῖς μυθικοῖς τῆς ἀληθείας παραπετάσμασιν ἀβασανίστως πειθομένους, ὃ δὴ καὶ τὸν Εὐθύφωνα παθόντα διήλεγξεν ὁ Σωκράτης ὡς τῶν θείων ἀνεπιστήμονα. Καὶ κατ' αὐτὸν

- ἄρα τὸν τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἔνθεον νοῦν τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα μεθαρμόζοντες εἰς τὴν περὶ τῶν ὄλων ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀποκρυπτομένην θεωρίαν ἀναπτύσσοντες τευξόμεθα τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον εἰλικρινοῦς θεραπείας.
34. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* III. p. 8: Ἄ γάρ ἐστιν ἐνοειδῶς ἐν τῇ μονάδι καὶ συνεπτυγμένως, ταῦτα διηρημένως ἐν τοῖς ἐκγόνοις τῆς μονάδος ἀναφαίνεται.
  35. Proclus, *Institutio theologica* 171: πρὸ γὰρ τοῦ διηρημένου τὸ συνεπτυγμένον καὶ ἐγγυτέρω τοῦ ἐνός. See also *In Eucl.* p. 19. The corresponding thought is also found in Cusanus, See T. Leinkauf, *Nicolaus Cusanus. Eine Einführung*, 105.
  36. See Plotinus, *Enn.* V 3,10; Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* I 19, p. 93: ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ, καθ' ὅσον ἑαυτοῦ τὴν νόησιν εἰς πλῆθος προήγαγε καὶ τὸ νοητὸν ἀνελίξας ἔχει· ψυχὴ μὲν γὰρ ἀνελίσσεται τὸν νοῦν, νοῦς δὲ αὐτὸν ἀνελίξεν, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ Πλωτῖνος ὀρθῶς πού φησι, περὶ τῶν νοητῶν ὑποβάσεων εἰπών.
  37. Proclus, *In Parmenidem* 705,7, I 102/103; See *In Tim.* III 105.
  38. Damascius, *De principiis*, p. 62: Ἄλλ' ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ κέντρῳ συνέπτυκται ὁ κύκλος καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ κέντρου, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ ἡνωμένῳ τὸ πᾶν τῆς διακρίσεως πλῆθος· ἀνὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ἐν τῷ ἐνί, τὸ τε κέντρον αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ κέντρῳ συνεπτυγμένα καὶ πάντα ὁμοίως ἀπλοῖζεται. Καὶ οὕτως ἐν τὰ πάντα λέγομεν, καὶ τὸ ἐν πάντα καὶ ἔτι πλέον, ὅτι κατὰ τὸ ἐν τὰ πάντα.
  39. Damascius, *De principiis* I, p. 130; See also pp. 273–274.
  40. Damascius, *Commentaire du Parmenide de Platon* I, p. 45.
  41. Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Categorias Comm.* CAG VIII, p. 28; See also Philoponus, *In Arist. Analytica Posteriora* CAG XIII/3, p. 377.
  42. Ps.-Simplicius, *In Aristotelis libros de anima*, CAG XI p. 42.
  43. Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo* n. 12, p. 15: omnia enim complicitate est quae esse possunt.
- Nicholas of Cusa, *Compendium* n. 29, p. 24: Quaecumque igitur aut esse aut cognosci possunt, in ipso posse complicantur et eius sunt. Nicholas of Cusa, n. 30, p. 24: Patet satis quod posse aequaliter unit omnia, complicat et explicat. Nicholas of Cusa, *De apice theoriae* n. 23, p. 132: Posse eligere in se complicat posse esse, posse vivere et posse intelligere. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 22, n. 67, p. 65: Imitabilis igitur singularitas est ipsum posse fieri, in cuius singulari potentia omnia singulariter complicantur et de ipsa explicantur. Nicholas of Cusa, *Dialogus de ludo globi* n. 49, pp. 54–55: Ioannes: Si bene cuncta capio, omnia sunt in deo et ibi sunt veritas, quae nec est plus nec minus. Sed ibi sunt complicitate et involute sicut circulus in puncto. Omnia sunt in motu. Sed ibi sunt, ut evolvuntur, sicut cum punctus unius pedis circini super alio evolvitur. Tunc enim punctus ille explicat circulum prius complicatum. Omnia in posse fieri sicut circulus in materia, quae in circulum duci potest. Et omnia sunt in possibilitate determinata sicut circulus actu descriptus.
44. S. Meier-Oeser, 'Potentia vs. Possibilitas?', pp. 237–253.
  45. Nicholas of Cusa, *Triologus de possest* n. 6, pp. 7–8: Coaeterna ergo sunt absoluta potentia et actus et utriusque nexus.
  46. See Nicholas of Cusa, *De pace fidei*, p. 29: tunc lux in Verbo complicat existit ita actu.
  47. Nicholas of Cusa, *Triologus de possest* n. 27, p. 32.
  48. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* I 21–22, n.27, pp. 44–45.
  49. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo LXXIV* n. 4, p. 452: est ars creativa complicans omne creabile, ars omnipotentiae complicans omne possibile.
  50. Nicholas of Cusa, *Triologus de possest* n. 7, p. 8: Et dico nunc nobis constare deum ante actualitatem, quae distinguitur a potentia, et ante possibilitatem, quae distinguitur ab actu, ...

51. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo CLXIX* n. 6, p. 227: Et sicut Deus in suo esse actu complicat omnes res, quae sunt aut fieri possunt, ita intellectus omnes omnium rerum similitudines complicat in virtute et explicat assimilando, et hoc est intelligere.
52. Nicholas of Cusa, *Compendium* n. 29, p. 24.
53. St.Meier-Oeser, 'Potentia vs. Possibilitas?', p. 253.
54. Plotinus V 3,15.
55. Plotinus III 8,10.
56. Plotinus, V 1,7.
57. Thierry of Chartres, *Commentaries*, pp. 156–157; 189–190; 271.
58. Thierry of Chartres, p. 157: Absoluta autem possibilitas est eiusdem universitatis rerum complicatio in possibilitate tantum de qua veniunt ad actum. In *de docta ignorantia* II 8, p. 87 Cusanus distances himself very clearly from the 'Peripatetics', who accept the created existence of 'absolute potentiality', whereas all that is created can exist only 'contracte' not 'absolute'. Who are these Peripatetics?
59. Thierry of Chartres, p. 157.
60. Thierry of Chartres, p. 272: Hec vero est possibilitas sola que omnia in se complicat. Est enim possibilitate universitas absoluta ... In eo ergo quod rerum universitas tum in hoc consistit quod flecti in hanc partem tum in hoc ut in contrariam possit relabi partem est possibilitas absoluta.
61. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* II 8, n. 132, p. 85.
62. See (approximately) Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* I, 3,4,2: Et ideo materia est sua potential passiva, sicut et Deus sua potentia activa.
63. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 27, n. 82, p. 78. On the distinction between posse fieri simpliciter and posse fieri contractum see *De venatione sapientiae*, c.28, n. 114, pp. 106–107.
64. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* I 16, n. 44, p. 31: Et ista est illa docta ignorantia, quam inquirimus; per quam Dionysius ipsum solum inveniri posse, non alio arbitror principio quam praefato, multipliciter ostendere nisus est.
65. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, pp. 12–13.
66. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* II 12, n. 162, p. 103: Ad ista iam dicta veteres non attigerunt, quia in docta ignorantia defecerunt.
67. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 12, n. 33, p. 34: Vides nunc venatores philosophos, qui nisi sunt rerum quiditates ignorata quiditate dei venari et qui dei quiditatem semper scibilem facere scitam nisi sunt, fecisse labores inutiles, quoniam campum doctae ignorantiae non intrarunt.
68. Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* XIII, n. 52, p. 45: intellectus est in ignorantia, qui scilicet scit se ignorantem tui.
69. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n. 26, p. 18.
70. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* I 1, n. 4, p. 6: Hoc si ad plenum assequi poterimus, doctam ignorantiam assequemur. Nihil enim homini etiam studiosissimo in doctrina perfectius adveniet quam in ipsa ignorantia, quae sibi propria est, doctissimum reperiri; et tanto quis doctior erit, quanto se sciverit magis ignorantem.
71. Nicholas of Cusa, *Dialogus de ludo globi*, n. 96, p. 121: aliis non posset. Hoc ex regula doctae ignorantiae constat, quae habet quod in recipientibus magis et minus non est devenire ad maximum et minimum simpliciter.
72. Nicolaus Cusanus, *De docta ignorantia* II 8, n. 135, p. 87.



73. Dionysius Areopagita, *De divinis nominibus* I 3; 112,2: ἀρχῆς ἀπάσης ὑπερουσίως ὑπεράρχιος ἀρχή.
74. Dionysius, Areopagite, *De Divinis Nominibus*. p. 126,7: Καλοῦσι γάρ, ὅπερ καὶ ἐν ἐτέροις ἔφην, οἱ τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς θεολογικῆς παραδόσεως ἱερομύσται τὰς μὲν ἐνώσεις τὰς θείας τὰς τῆς ὑπεραρρήτου καὶ ὑπεραγνώστου μονιμότητος κρυφίας καὶ ἀνεκφοιτήτους ὑπεριδρύσεις, ...; See Dionysius, Areopagite, p. 115,13.
75. Dionysius Areopagita, *De myst. Theol.* p. 144,9: Καὶ τότε καὶ αὐτῶν ἀπολύεται τῶν ὁρωμένων καὶ τῶν ὁρώντων καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας εἰσδύνει τὸν ὄντως μυστικόν, καθ' ὃν ἀπομύει πάσας τὰς γνωστικὰς ἀντιλήψεις, καὶ ἐν τῷ πάμπαν ἀναφεῖ καὶ ἀοράτῳ γίγνεται, ...
76. Dionysius uses the concept of γνόφος to signify the darkness of learned unknowing which corresponds to the 'divine darkness' (Ep. 5,1) entspricht. See Dionysius Areopagite, *De myst. Theol.* p. 145,1. 147,9. See Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Theophilum adversus Apollinaristas*, GNO III 1, p. 123; In Inscript. Ps. GNO V p. 104; In *Canticum* GNO VI 322-323; *De vita Moysis* GNO VII/1 c.1,46 u.ö. On Gregory of Nyssa's critique of the knowledge of essence see T. Kobusch, *Selbstwerdung und Personalität*, 286f.
77. See the essay by Ysable de Andia in this volume.
78. Dionysius Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* VII 3, pp. 197, 198,15: Μήποτε οὖν ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, ὅτι θεὸν γινώσκομεν οὐκ ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως, ἄγνωστον γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ πάντα λόγον καὶ νοῦν ὑπεραίρον, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς πάντων τῶν ὄντων διατάξεως ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένης καὶ εἰκόνας τινὰς καὶ ὁμοιώματα τῶν θείων αὐτοῦ παραδειγμάτων ἐχούσης εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ὁδῷ καὶ τάξει κατὰ δύναμιν ἄνιμεν ἐν τῇ πάντων ἀφαιρέσει καὶ ὑπεροχῇ καὶ ἐν τῇ πάντων αἰτίᾳ. Διὸ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ὁ θεὸς γινώσκεται καὶ χωρὶς πάντων. Καὶ διὰ γνώσεως ὁ θεὸς γινώσκεται καὶ διὰ ἀγνωσίας. Καὶ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ καὶ νόησις καὶ λόγος καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐπαφή καὶ αἴσθησις καὶ δόξα καὶ φαντασία καὶ ὄνομα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα, καὶ οὔτε νοεῖται οὔτε λέγεται οὔτε ὀνομάζεται. Καὶ οὐκ ἔστι τι τῶν ὄντων, οὐδὲ ἐν τινι τῶν ὄντων γινώσκεται. Καὶ «ἐν πᾶσι πάντα» ἐστὶ καὶ ἐν οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν καὶ ἐκ πάντων πᾶσι γινώσκεται καὶ ἐξ οὐδενὸς οὐδενί. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ ταῦτα ὀρθῶς περὶ θεοῦ λέγομεν, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ὑμνεῖται κατὰ τὴν πάντων ἀναλογίαν, ὣν ἔστιν αἴτιος. Καὶ ἔστιν αὐθις ἡ θειοτάτη θεοῦ γνώσις ἡ δι' ἀγνωσίας γινωσκομένη κατὰ τὴν ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔνωσιν, ὅταν ὁ νοῦς τῶν ὄντων πάντων ἀποστάς, ἔπειτα καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἀφείς ἐνωθῇ ταῖς ὑπερφαέσιν ἀκτίσιν ἐκείθεν καὶ ἐκεῖ τῷ ἀνεξερευνήτῳ βάθει τῆς σοφίας καταλαμπόμενος.
79. See Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* n. 20, p. 14: cessat ab omni ratiocinatione; Nicholas of Cusa, n. 22, p. 16: Docta enim ignorantia de alta regione intellectus existens sic iudicat de ratiocinativo discursu.
80. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* I 89, p. 56: per quam tantum ad infinitae bonitatis Deum maximum unitrinum secundum gradus doctrinae ipsius ignorantiae accedere posse explicavimus....
81. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n. 27, p. 19: licet docta ignorantia sibi iudicium veri retineat.
82. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n. 31, p. 21.
83. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* I 11, p. 21.
84. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 20, n. 90, p. 47: sed maxime ex Dionysii maximi theologi libellis recitata sum admiratus. Cum enim Proculum illum Platonicum in libro de Platonis divini theologia de Graeco ver- terem hiis diebus in Latinum, ea ipsa quasi eodem quoque expres- sionis tenore ac modo repperi, [ ... ] Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, Proculum tuum, Petre, Dionysio Areopagita tempore posteriorem fuisse certum est. An autem



- Dionysii scripta viderit, est incertum. Nicholas of Cusa: Petrus. Sicut Dionysius inquit unum, quod est posterius uno simpliciter, ita et Proclus Platonem referens asserit. See *de beryllo* n. 12, p. 15: Recte igitur, ut Proclus recitat in commentariis Parmenidis, Plato omnia de ipso principio negat. Sic et Dionysius noster negativam praefert theologiam affirmativae. De venatione sapientiae, c. 22, n. 64, p. 62: Dionysius, qui Platonem imitatur, in campo unitatis similem venationem fecit et negationes, quae <non> sunt privationes, sed excellentiae et praegnantes affirmationes, veriores dicit affirmationibus. Proclus vero, qui Origenem allegat, post Dionysium venit. Dionysium sequendo, unum et bonum—licet ita Plato primum nominaverit—de primo negat, quod penitus est ineffabile. Hos mirandos.
85. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 15, n. 73, pp. 38–39: Quia licet ipsum unum propinque ad ipsum ‘non aliud’ accedat (sc. Dionysius), adhuc tamen fatetur ante unum esse supersubstantiale unum; | et hoc utique est unum ante ipsum unum, quod est unum. Et hoc tu quidem ipsum ‘non aliud’ vides.
  86. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 1, n. 5, p. 5. See auch W. Beierwaltes, ‘Der verborgene Gott zu *De non aliud*’, S.160–169, hier: 165.
  87. On Nicholas’ critique of the scholastic doctrine of transcendence see. J. B. Elpert, ‘Unitas—Aequalitas—Nexus’, 143ff.
  88. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 4, n. 13, p. 10: Quamvis unum propinquum admodum ad ‘non aliud’ videatur, quando quidem omne aut unum dicatur aut aliud, ita quod unum quasi ‘non aliud’ appareat, nihilominus tamen unum, cum nihil aliud quam unum sit, aliud est ab ipso ‘non aliud’. Igitur ‘non aliud’ est simplicius uno, cum ab ipso ‘non aliud’ habeat, quod sit unum; et non e converso. Enimvero quidam theologi unum pro ‘non aliud’ accipientes ipsum unum ante contradictionem per-spexerunt, quemadmodum in Platonis Parmenide legitur atque in Areopagita Dionysio. Tamen, cum unum sit aliud a non uno, nequaquam dirigit in primum omnium principium, quod sive ab alio sive a nihilo aliud esse non potest, quod item nulli est contrarium, ut inferius videbis.
  89. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 4, n. 14, p. 10: Ferdinandus. Si recte te capio, ita ‘non aliud’ videtur ante omnia, quod ex hiis, quae post ipsum videntur, nullis abesse possit, si quidem etiam sint contradictoria.
  90. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 14, n. 52, p. 28: [ ... ], quae quidem sunt, ut sic dixerim, ‘non aliata’ eius, et a quibus scilicet ipsum ‘non aliud’ aliud non est.
  91. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 5, n. 15, p. 11: Esse enim intelligereve quippiam extra ‘non aliud’ sed ne fingere quidem mihi est possibile; adeo ut, si ipsum quoque nihil et ignorare videre absque ‘non aliud’ coner, videre frustra et incassum coner. Quomodo enim nihil nihil visibile nisi per ‘non aliud’, ut sit non aliud quam nihil? Pari modo.
  92. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 14, n. 40, p. 39: Et cum quaero: ‘Quid est igitur aliud?’, bene respondetur ipsum aliud esse non aliud quam aliud. Et sic mundus est non aliud quam mundus; Et sic mundus est non aliud quam mundus; et ita de omnibus, quae nominari possunt.
  93. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 14, n. 40, pp. 39–40: Sublato enim li non aliud non manet li aliud. Oportet enim aliud, si esse debet, esse non aliud quam aliud;
  94. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 15, n. 43, p. 43: Bonitas igitur solis non est ipsum non aliud simpliciter, sed ipsum non aliud solare, quoniam in sole sol est; ita in omnibus. The precedence of the not-other even over identity remains somewhat understated in W. Beierwaltes, ‘Identität und Differenz’, pp. 114–120.
  95. See P. Casarella, ‘Cusanus on Dionysius’, p. 141.

96. See P. Casarella, 'Cusanus on Dionysius', p. 143.
97. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 14, n. 41, p. 40: Advertas autem, quomodo li non aliud non significat tantum sicut li idem. Sed cum idem sit non aliud quam idem, non aliud ipsum et omnia, quae nominari possunt, praecedit. Ideo etsi deus non-minetur non aliud, quia ipse est non aliud ab alio quocumque,—sed propterea non est idem cum aliquo. Sicut enim non est aliud a caelo, ita non est idem cum caelo. Habent igitur omnia ut non alia quam sunt, quia deus ipsa diffinit, et ab ipso non aliud habent non aliud in specie generare, sed sibi simile efficere. Bonitas igitur bonificat, album albificat, et ita de omnibus.
98. Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 14, n. 41, p. 40: Non aliud igitur cum sit ante aliud, non potest fieri aliud et est actu omne, quod simpliciter esse potest.
99. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 6, n. 21, p. 14: Deus autem, quia non aliud est ab alio, non est aliud, quamvis non aliud et aliud videantur opponi; sed non opponitur aliud ipsi, a quo habet quod est aliud, ut praediximus. Nunc vides, quomodo recte theologi affirmarunt Deum in omnibus omnia, | licet omnium nihil. See also *De venatione sapientiae*, c. 14, n. 41, p. 40: negatio non opponitur affirmationi. Nam li non aliud non opponitur li aliud, cum ipsum diffiniat et praecedat. Extra hunc campum negatio
100. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 7, n. 25, p. 16: Si igitur mens sine ipso 'non aliud' nec videre potest nec non videre, non igitur ipsum 'non aliud' potest non videri, sicut non potest non sciri, quod per scientiam scitur atque ignorantiam.
101. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 8, n. 31, p. 18: Nicolaus. Bene nunc quidem clareque mente vides ipsum 'non aliud' in omni cognitione praesupponi et cognosci, neque quod cognoscitur ab ipso aliud esse, sed esse ipsum incognitum, quod in cognito cognite relucescit, sicut solis claritas sensibiliter invisibilis in iridis coloribus visibilibus visibiliter relucet varie in varia nube.
102. Nicholas of Cusa, *De non aliud*, c. 19, n. 88, p. 46: Philosophus ille certissimum credidit negativae affirmativam contra- dicere, quodque simul de eodem utpote repugnantia dici non possent. Hoc autem dixit rationis via id ipsum sic verum concludentis. Quodsi quis ab eo quaesivisset, quid est aliud, utique vere respondere potuisset: «non aliud quam aliud est.» Et consequenter si quaerens adiecisset: quare aliud est aliud? sane quidem, ut prius, dicere valuisset: «quia non aliud quam aliud est»; et ita 'non aliud' et aliud neque sibi ut repugnantia vidisset contradicere.

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## CHAPTER 30

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# MARSILIO FICINO AND THE DIONYSIAN CORPUS

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MARK EDWARDS WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF  
MICHAEL ALLEN

WE see the fifteenth century in Italy as the era in which medieval ignorance and credulity were dispelled, first by a widening trickle of fugitives from Byzantium with manuscripts of Plato and the Greek classics, and then by the development of a critical approach to these texts, which not only rid them of numerous scribal errors but unmasked false attributions by exposing anachronisms of style and content. To us the strictures of Lorenzo Valla on the Dionysian corpus are so unanswerable that we cannot imagine how any scholar, even in his own day could have gainsaid them. We forget, however, that ages of scholarly ferment are also apt to be ages of faith, and in this period an old faith and a new conspired to uphold the traditional authorship of the corpus. On the one hand, an uncontested belief in the plenary and prophetic inspiration of Scripture could easily be extended to the writings of an Athenian converted by St Paul; on the other hand, it was those who were most warmly attached to the pagan school of Athens who had most need to cite Dionysius as a proof and explanation of its perfect compatibility with the teaching of the apostles. The subject of this essay was not only the translator of Plato and numerous lucubrations by his successors, but the Proclus and Plotinus of his own age in his eloquent commentaries on the dialogues. As the present essay will show, these labours of Ficino are not subverted but crowned by his commentaries on his own renderings of the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names*, the purpose of which was to show that Dionysius had been to the Neoplatonists what Moses had been to Plato himself, and hence that there was no cause to fear that the path to the liberation of the soul, as described by the Platonists, would lead a Christian anywhere but to the kingdom of God.

## LIFE AND WORK

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Born near Florence in 1433, Ficino had the good fortune to be the son of a doctor who enjoyed the patronage of the Medici.<sup>1</sup> His education fostered an eclectic taste for

classical philosophy, perhaps with an early leaning to the Epicureans;<sup>2</sup> nevertheless, it was as a writer and lecturer on Plato that he rose to prominence with the continued assistance of the Medici. His interests were never purely academic, as he intimated in 1474 by giving to his *Platonic Theology* the tentative title *On the Immortality of the Soul*.<sup>3</sup> In his view, all ancient wisdom had as its end the elevation of the soul from its bondage to the carnal appetite, and his works include a treatise on astrology as well as a translation of the *Hermetica*, which he believed to have been composed under divine inspiration centuries before Plato (Salaman 2002). His instinct in this age of unstinting polemic was always to reconcile authorities rather than set them against one another. Thus, when he was invited by Bessarion (1403–1472) to take up the cause of Plato against George of Trebizond's advocacy of Aristotle, he gladly fulfilled the first half of this request, but defied both protagonists by endorsing the ancient thesis of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>4</sup> Again, although he praised Gemistus Pletho for prompting Cosimo de' Medici to found a new Platonic Academy,<sup>5</sup> he could not endorse either Pletho's denunciation of Aristotle as an enemy to the Church or his prediction that a rejuvenated Platonism would supersede both Christianity and Islam (Kraye 2003: 27–28). He also alludes to Nicholas of Cusa, but does not imitate his attempts to circumvent the language of Proclus and Plotinus in his characterization of the first principle.<sup>6</sup> Nor, although he himself became a priest, does he follow the Cardinal Bessarion in building his own conception of the Church on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which seems to have been for him the least engaging of the five works ascribed to the Areopagite.

It has been said of Ficino that he set out to construct a Platonic theology in contrast to the Christian philosophy of the Thomists (Lohr 1988: 577). While this verdict can be assessed only after pondering his Dionysian commentaries, it is certainly true that he argued throughout his life, with a tenacity seldom rivalled before or since, for the perfect consonance of Christianity and Platonism. It is also true that most of the works in which he sought to demonstrate this were translations of Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus, together with dissertations on select texts and on cardinal tenets of Platonism, above all the doctrine of love.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, allusions to the Dionysian writings in his letters and publications are intermittent until he turned his hand to the *Mystical Theology* in 1490, when he was almost sixty years of age.<sup>8</sup> That the only book which he had the time to undertake after the Dionysian commentaries was a commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans* might be taken as evidence either that his faith had been quickened by the approach of death or else that, like Origen, he saw philosophy as a propaedeutic to biblical study. The difference is that Ficino is predominantly a philosopher, who is not afraid to reason independently (as Origen never does) to the existence of an absolutely transcendent and ineffable *First Principle*, which he assumes (with Aquinas) that 'all men call God'. Echoes of the *Summa contra Gentiles* are pervasive even in the latest writings of Ficino (Collins 2012); nevertheless, a new trend of Italian scholarship that he follows parts company with Aquinas also in ascribing more authority to Plato than to Aristotle, at least if the former is held to stand for the finitude and knowability of the first principle. Reasons may be urged against or in favour of the charge that Aquinas and his teacher Albert clipped the wings of the Areopagite with the scissors of rationalism, but as we shall see, this is not a charge on which Ficino could even be arraigned.



And yet, while he inflexibly places the One above being, Ficino endows the One with attributes that might be thought more proper to intellect, and hence with being according to the common interpretation of Plotinus. It can be argued that this redistribution of predicates was required of every Christian who did not have the temerity to deny love, will, and knowledge to the Creator. In maintaining this as the true opinion of the Platonists, Ficino adopts an Aristotelian reading of both Plato and Plotinus, believing as he does that while Aristotle sometimes errs by departing from Plato, he has nonetheless understood him better than all but the foremost of his professed disciples (Lohr 1988: 572). This assimilation of schools which others in his day perceived as rivals is made possible by attributing to the Aristotelian God a supraintellectual character. Even before he translated the Dionysian corpus, therefore, Ficino had effected that conflation of the first and second antinomies of the *Parmenides* which enabled the Areopagite to remain a Christian. At the very inception of his labours on Dionysius he found an adversary in Pico della Mirandola, his younger and less prudent contemporary, whose conviction that there are sources of revelation other than Scripture exposed him to the charge of heresy (Edelheit 2008). A heretic among Platonists also, he urged that all sound philosophy asserts the identity of the one and being. If Plato appeared to deny this in the *Parmenides*, it was only as the conclusion of a hypothesis that he did not hold as his own (*Dell' ente*, p. 201 Bacchelli and Ebghi). In the *Sophist*, Pico argues, Plato equates the two (Pico, *Dell' ente*, p. 212), and no one can be a true disciple of this philosopher if he contends that oneness is more universal than being, so that certain subjects of predication may possess unity without existing (Pico, *Dell' ente*, p. 220). It is incoherent to say that there is anything without being, since that is to say that the existent does not exist (Pico, *Dell' ente*, p. 214). To God as the source of all that exists we must therefore ascribe not non-existence but superessentiality (pp. 224–226), as Dionysius clearly intimates when, following Moses (Exodus 3.14), he characterizes God as He who Is (Pico, *Dell' ente*, pp. 218; 226). Such reasoning was not of course unprecedented: the Dominican tradition adopted both the way of negation and the way of supereminence, and Eckhart had maintained that these ways are one. We shall see that they converge in Ficino also, and that much of the difference between him and Pico lies in nomenclature rather than metaphysics: one declines to affirm, and the other to deny, the being of that which they agree to be superior to being even in the loftiest sense that the mind can grasp.

## THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

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In 1490 Ficino began his translation and annotation of the Dionysian corpus with the *Mystical Theology*, announcing it as the latest of the exercises in Platonism to which he had been moved by his genius, or attendant spirit.<sup>9</sup> His method of commenting on this 'Platonic philosopher and Christian theologian' is to introduce each chapter with a gloss, almost always longer than the original text, which forestalls any doubt regarding either the orthodoxy of Dionysius or his competence as a metaphysician. Long study of



the Platonists had taught him that a metaphysics is incomplete without an epistemology, and he was also the heir to three centuries of Victorine and Dominican exposition of the corpus, which had treated it not only as an essay in hermeneutics but a manual to the cultivation of higher cognitive faculties. Accordingly, his second chapter, recalling the derivation of the name Dionysius from the god Dionysus, warns the reader that only those who have entered a divine ecstasy or frenzy, kindled partly by inborn love and partly by inspiration, will be able, through the 'wonderful' and rhapsodic 'composition of his words', to pierce the mysteries obscurely divulged by the prophets and apostles. That Dionysius was privy to these mysteries Ficino has no doubt, for he repeatedly asserts, notwithstanding Valla, that Dionysius was the first Christian interpreter of Plato, a correspondent of John the Evangelist, and the unacknowledged teacher of pagan Platonists from Numenius to Proclus.<sup>10</sup> The suppression of the name of Dionysius in these texts he explained by a theory of dissimulation, comparable (as Michael Allen observes<sup>11</sup>) to the one that Augustine and Cicero had advanced to account for the failure of the Academics to propagate the authentic teaching of Plato. We may add that it is also an extension of the theory, held by a number of early Christians, that Plato himself was a clandestine student of Moses, who had concealed his true opinions for fear of offending the mob.

The prefatory comment to the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* begins with a salutation of Paul as the sun of the world (echoing the Dionysian eulogy of Hierotheus), then proceeds to liken the Trinity itself to the substance, the light, and the warmth, and the sun (*Mystical Theology* [hereafter MT], ch. 3). With the immediate caveat that the Trinity is not a number, he equates it with the inexpressible Good which is superior to knowledge as matter is inferior to knowledge, invisible by excess of light as darkness is invisible by defect (MT 4.3). By contrast, the Dionysian prayer to the Trinity speaks of the silent splendour of darkness, not of the threefold character of the sun (MT 5); nor does it declare, as Ficino does in a reminiscence of Victorine teaching, that the infinite Good is known only to infinite love (MT 3.1). He goes on to pre-empt the next chapter from Dionysius—in which Timothy is urged to rise above sense and intellect to that which surpasses thought and essence in the darkness of unknowing (MT 7)—by naming the cognitive faculties in an incremental series, more germane to the medieval pursuit of mystical states than to the ancient quest for the mystical sense of Scripture (MT 6.1). Plato's divided line in the *Republic* is clearly his model, but whereas Plato's four epistemic states are conjecture, belief, discursive reason, and intellection,<sup>12</sup> Ficino replaces the first two with sensation and imagination: sensation is less pejorative than conjecture, while imagination proves, as the commentary unfolds, to be a nobler and more active capacity than Platonic belief.<sup>13</sup> From Plotinus rather than from his Christian source he shows that the proper object of intellection is the manifold realm of being, and hence that the seeker of God must rise above the intelligible to that which has no share in multiplicity (MT 6.2). Once again he adds that the only faculty by which we transcend the intelligible is love, in relation to which our suprasensible and supraessential object is called the Good (MT 6.4).

The next chapter from Dionysius, in which he warns against the profanation of the mysteries (MT 10), is glossed in advance by a reference to Plato's letters<sup>14</sup> and then by

Plotinian arguments that both the Good and the One are superior to understanding—the Good because it is sought even when it is not understood (MT 9.2), and the One because even matter and deformity, which do not partake of being, must partake of unity if they are to be subjects of predication (MT 8.7). To plot the ascent from the lowest to the highest, he introduces the Neoplatonic analysis of the intelligible into being, life, and mind (MT 9.4), observing with Proclus that whereas all life participates in being and all intelligence in life, each of these orders is dependent in its own way on the Good (see further Edwards 1997). The primacy of the Good is illustrated by the fact that we cannot hate it although we can hate whatever is lower (MT 9.7). The familiar conclusion that it is found by love alone is once again unprompted by Dionysius, whose most distinctive usage of the word *eros* denotes not our ascent to God but the condescension of God to us.

Introducing the chapter in which Dionysius asserts the necessity of both cataphatic and apophatic speech about God (MT 12), Ficino invokes the *Parmenides* of Plato, in which, as he says, all things are both affirmed and denied of the one (MT 11.2). Plotinus and his successors attached the negation to the One and the affirmations to the One-Many which is intellect; Dionysius attaches both to God, to the discomfort of some modern scholars (Corsini 1962); he was not, however, likely to be called to account for this by a commentator whose own philosophy, as we have seen, allots some traits of Plotinian intellect to the One on the presumed authority of Aristotle. To say that God is essence is true only in the qualified sense that he is the cause of essence: to say that he is not essence is true with respect to any notion of essence that human intelligence can frame (MT 11.3). He adds the proviso that God does not lack essence, as matter does, by being deprived of that which it would be better to possess (MT 11.4). In the next passage of commentary, Dionysius' observation that 'some use many words of God, some few and some none' (MT 14) is taken to mean that while some speak of God both cataphatically and apophatically, and others only cataphatically of his causal action, those who keep silence come closest to representing him as he is (MT 13.1). The three modes are correlated with an ascent from the corporeal through the animate to the intellectual, the Good existing beyond all three, and again become more knowable as speech gives way to love (MT 13.3).

To prepare us for the chapter in which Dionysius recounts the ascent of Moses into the darkness of unknowing at the peak of Sinai (MT 17.1), Ficino reminds us once again that the mind cannot gaze without blinking at the sun (MT 15.2). Remembering both the book of Exodus and the *Celestial Hierarchy*, he introduces angels into his summary of the ascent (MT 15.4), and remarks that whereas Dionysius subordinates the intelligible to the Good, the Neoplatonists also subordinate the intellectual to the intelligible, while Proclus goes so far as to intercalate an intermediate category of the intellectual and intelligible (MT 15.6). For the first time in his commentary, Ficino sets Dionysius against the Platonists, arguing that the Christian does not acknowledge three distinct orders of being, but only the subordination to the God of three divine intellects, corresponding to being, life, and mind. Appending a paraphrase of Plato's comparison of the Good to the sun which illumines and nourishes all things (*Republic* 508b), he concludes, in vein more biblical than Greek, that as we do not cause the sun to nourish us, so we do not attain to the presence of God by the exercise of will but by his unobligated grace

(MT 16.2). There is something of a return to Plato in the following lemma, where he comments on Dionysius' comparison of the gradual renunciation of predicates to the paring away of stone to produce a statue (MT 19). The source for Dionysius is the *Phaedrus*, mediated by Plotinus and perhaps Gregory of Nyssa, in both of whom the statue represents the soul.<sup>15</sup> Ficino adds, however (with a nod to *Timaeus* 92c), that not only the soul but the world is an image of God (MT 18.2). He now prescribes a series of experiments in diremption—of matter, dimension, and form from the world, of colour from the field of vision, of mass and other properties from the sun—all of which he takes to be analogous to the stripping of the soul (MT 18.3–4). On the other hand, the seven stages of abstraction from the corporeal to the intellectual knowledge of ourselves (and hence of God) appears to be modelled on a Platonizing treatise that was unknown to Dionysius, Augustine's *On the Magnitude of the Soul*.<sup>16</sup>

In a comment that for once is shorter than the text succeeding it (MT 21), Ficino again proposes the light of the sun, this time in its three dimensions (length and breadth and height) as a model for the Trinity (MT 20). These terms betoken a Trinitarian reading of Ephesians 3.18; they also anticipate the subsequent chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, in which speech is said to increase in breadth as it comes down from the pinnacle of Sinai (MT 23). Between the two Dionysian texts Ficino inserts his own taxonomy of the cognitive faculties: imagination performs with fewer acts what the senses perform with many, reason gathers the many forms into a universal species, and intellect apprehends in a single intuition all that reason beholds discursively (MT 22.1). In his next comment he explains a contrast about to be drawn by Dionysius between the way of affirmation and that of negation (MT 25). The former proceeds from the higher to the lower, because the higher affirmation does not render the lower redundant; the latter proceeds from the lower to the higher, since if we began by negating the highest attributes, nothing more would remain to be unsaid (MT 24.1–2). In his penultimate comment, approaching the Dionysian embargo on a long catalogue of predicates (MT 27), Ficino argues that God's role as the cause of all is acknowledged as much by Plato as by Moses (MT 26.2–5), and that since it follows from this that he lacks nothing, the denial of lesser properties is merely a preamble to the assertion of his supereminent properties (MT 26.2–8). The surprising peroration of the *Mystical Theology*, which denies to God life and being, likeness and unlikeness, eternity and time, and even such biblical predicates as spirit and paternity (MT 29), is interpreted to mean that there is no way of speaking of him that converts ignorance into knowledge (MT 28.6), and that even the Dionysian ways fall far short of one who admits of no subtraction or addition (MT 28.7). And so it is to the Plato of the *Parmenides*,<sup>17</sup> not to Moses, that Ficino gives the last word on the irredeemable impotence of words.

## THE DIVINE NAMES

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In the prologue to his *Commentary on the Divine Names*<sup>18</sup>, Ficino confesses that he intends to handle this text more summarily than the *Mystical Theology*, and in a mode that is primarily Platonic.<sup>19</sup> At the same time he asserts the superiority of Dionysius

not only to all his Platonic successors but to Plato himself he translates with great fidelity the opening chapter in which Dionysius avers that all talk of God must be guided by the sacred oracles, by which he evidently means the Scriptures. As the heir to numerous translators—the most recent being Traversari, whose influence is still to be fully appraised (see Lackner 2002: 21–23)—Ficino was able to combine fidelity with felicity, and while he sometimes breaks an anfractuous sentence of the Greek into two Latin sentences, he seldom misses a nuance or fails to convey the full content of the original. One might at first be inclined to think otherwise when he renders *huperousios* on its first occurrence as *superior quam essentia* rather than *superessentialis*:<sup>20</sup> is he not begging the question as to whether God is higher than essence or merely the bearer of a higher essence? In fact, however, the Greek goes on to vindicate him by saying that God is higher than *ousia* (*Divine Names* 1.1, 108.8 Suchla), and on the next occurrence of *huperousios* Ficino clearly feels that his point is sufficiently established to permit the translation *superessentialis*.<sup>21</sup> His case for the harmony of Christianity and Platonism does not rely on any tendentious rendering of Dionysian Greek.

The first premise that the two theologies have in common, according to Ficino, is that no one can attain to God by the exercise of intellect without love (DN 1.3–4). This, as has been remarked upon earlier, is a salient tenet of some Platonic dialogues and an axiom of the mysticism that stems from Dionysius in the later Middle Ages; if it is not so conspicuous in Dionysius himself, the reason is that he is giving directions for the parsing of Scripture rather than for the elevation of our cognitive faculties. Ficino himself goes on to embrace the Dionysian presupposition that truth about God is derived from revelation rather than from any power internal to us; he finds corroboration in a dictum from the *Timaeus* that many scholars would now regard as a humorous sally.<sup>22</sup> Having alleged that even the Peripatetics agree with the Platonists in holding that essence and being are imparted by a more universal cause (DN 5.4), he equates the divine light of the soul in Plato with Paul's rapture into the third heaven (DN 7.4); he also adduces Plotinus as a witness that the rational soul is united with God before knowing him and in a mode transcending knowledge, but does not say whether by God he means the intellect or the One (7.3). The argument of Plotinus that the One is everywhere present and everywhere absent is supported by the inspiration of Orpheus and the intuition of Plato (DN 9.4); the conclusion that Ficino draws, however—namely that we who cannot look directly on God must see by the light of Scripture would have dismayed the Platonists, notwithstanding his invocation of Iamblichus, Zoroaster, and Amelius' eulogy of the Gospel of John (DN 11.3; 15.9).

When he cites Platonic dialogues in chorus to prove that God has stamped his own nature on our souls (DN 13.4), he may be suspected of closing the biblical gap between the Creator and his image; and even if we do not object to his making a theist of Plato in this passage, modern scholars will not condone his subsequent attempt to cull a proof of the resurrection of the body from the *Statesman*.<sup>23</sup> His extrapolation of the Christian Trinity from the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the letters of Plato may be more pardonable (DN 15.7), as there are eminent commentators even now who would find it cogent; on the other hand even Ficino has no Platonists at his elbow when he first alludes to the

mediation of angels (DN 15.8; 17.6; 21.3), although he later professes to speak on their authority.<sup>24</sup> He repeatedly measures the Platonists against the Aristotelians, sometimes commending the latter (see DN 31.4; 329.6) and sometimes hinting that it was the Platonists who perceived what was required to complete their system (17.1; 37.4). Perhaps his nearest approach to a criticism of this school is his observation that the majority of its adherents suppose that the reprobate will not be punished for ever; even here, the Christian tenet that hell will be everlasting needs to be justified by the argument that, since there will be various modes of punishment, the word 'everlasting' (*sempiternus*) will not imply absence of change (DN 156.3). When the Areopagite at last declares the Beautiful and Good to be the universal object (DN 110; 112), Ficino takes this as his signal for an excursus on the Beautiful and the Good (DN 109; 111), in which he reminds us of his own treatise on the *Symposium* (Laurens 2002). Dionysius' protestations that we ought not to fear the word *erôs* but the abuse of it (DN 113; cf. 115 and 117) is reinforced in Ficino by a comment on the power of imagination—the rung that Ficino adds to the Platonic ladder of knowledge—which is now said to function only when our bodily eyes are sealed (DN 114.2).

The thesis that God himself is love, for which Dionysius found some warrant in Proclus, receives strikingly little consideration in Ficino's commentary. Passages in which the Areopagite speaks of love as a divine ecstasy, irresistibly seizing those who have the capacity to receive it (DN 121–123) are rapidly converted into assertions of the necessity of seeking God by love rather than knowledge (DN 120), while God is said by Ficino to be called love insofar as he loves himself, begets love in others, and like Aristotle's deity, is the unmoved mover of the enamoured soul (DN 124.1–2). One reason might be that he cannot elicit this notion from Plotinus (in whom the only object of love for the One is the One itself), and it is his custom to prefer the earlier to the later Neoplatonists. Thus, when the brief assertion in Dionysius that God is being, life, and wisdom prompts him to ask whether these three causes are strictly subordinate to the more universal cause or included within it, he sides with Plotinus and Porphyry, who in his view take the second position, against Syrianus and Proclus, who in his view take the first (DN 329.3–4; cf. 214.2–3). To modern scholars, who see Dionysian Platonism as a tributary to that of Proclus, this is perverse; since, however, Ficino believes Dionysius to be the secret master of both Plotinus and Proclus, he is not surprised to find that the stream is purest near the spring. Plotinus, rather than any Christian author, is co-opted to refute the Manichaean error of postulating an evil principle as the source of matter (DN 178.1; cf. 148.1). Ficino deftly explains that Plotinus agrees with orthodox Christians in attributing evil not to matter itself but to its liability (DN 170; 172), and in adding that even this would not be fatal to the soul were it not that, as the active principle, is capable of abusing its free will. Augustine and Aquinas had both written with zeal against the Manichaeans, but they are quoted barely more often than Averroes (DN 57.2; 319.3), though Aquinas is called our leader in theology at DN 323.7. Augustine is almost rebuked at DN 158.5 for his failure to contradict the Greek Christians who affirm that every angel has a body.<sup>25</sup> Ficino, by contrast, endorses (what he takes to be) the Platonic definition of an angel as a pure intellectual substance (DN, 152) and proceeds

to distinguish three orders of angels, the first of which remains wholly free of matter, while the second mingles with the sublunar elements, and the third immerses itself in the physical realm.

Ficino does not correlate this triad with the nine angelic orders of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and did not produce a commentary on that text. As Michael Allen has pointed out,<sup>26</sup> the Dionysian commentaries must have been written concurrently with Ficino's *Commentary on the Parmenides*, for in that work he occasionally refers to his expositions of Dionysius, while in chapter 341 of *On the Divine Names* he not only cites the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, with that on Plotinus and his *Platonic Theology*, but asseverates that Dionysius is never more of a Platonist than in his pronouncements on the oneness of God. This judgement implies that Dionysius is also something other than a Platonist, and Michael Allen cites the conceit that matter is the inverted image of God as an illustration of the synergy of biblical and Platonic motifs in Ficino.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, he derives from the *Parmenides* through Proclus the argument that the non-being of matter mirrors that of the One insofar as defect can mirror excess (DN 99.2; 50. On the other hand, he identifies matter with the formless deep of Genesis 1.2 (DN 91.4), appealing to the ineffable power of God to account for the permanence of this inconceivable substrate, and tracing such awareness as we have of it to the edict of Genesis 1.3, 'let there be light', which, as an act of willed causation, is not consistent with the Platonic notion of irrepressible superabundance (DN 93.7–9). This being said, it is arguable that Ficino finds it easier to reconcile Plato and Moses, in the tradition of Numenius and Eusebius,<sup>28</sup> than to accommodate the more original elements of the gospel. Thus when he has to comment on the term 'peace' in Dionysius, he equates it instantaneously with the harmony or concord of the Platonic cosmos (DN 315.1); but when Dionysius invites us to admire the mercy of Christ in bestowing this peace for our reconciliation, Ficino takes the word 'reconciliation' to denote 'the true worship of god so happily introduced by Christ'.<sup>29</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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Thus there is no one tendency in Ficino's commentaries either to the Christianization of Platonism or to the Platonization of Christianity. The coalescence of Aristotle's god with the One of Plotinus in his previous works permits him to assume without question that Platonists are not only theists but monotheists; that Aristotle's god is the God of the Bible is a further presupposition that could be sheltered from scrutiny under the wing of Aquinas. In arguing that our insuperable ignorance forces us back to the infallible word of Scripture, he accords to this one revelation an authority which Plato granted to no book and the Platonists not even to Plato himself, since they never formally maintained that his teaching (or for that matter, that of the *Chaldaean Oracles*) should be accepted even where it lacks the support of reason. As we have seen, he converts the angelology of his Christian author into a Platonic demonology, assuming a correspondence between the two orders that he never tries to elucidate in detail. In consequence he can



posit a state of pure intellection without embodiment, which as he concedes, was not vouchsafed to any of the angels by Augustine. He would insist, of course, that he was not producing a hybrid of two philosophies but revealing a deep homology, which he explains by making Dionysius himself the second fount of Platonism. Even in holding creation to be an act of will and not merely an expression of the divine nature, he was supplementing rather than contradicting the Platonists of the Roman era, so long as he did not expressly add that it was within the power of God to will otherwise.

How much truth, then, is there in the dictum that Ficino set out to construct a Platonic theology rather than a Christian Platonism? The former term is the chosen title of his *magnum opus* (Hankins and Allen 2001), and even its subtitle hints that he accorded more importance to the survival of the soul than to the bodily restoration for which the Church required him to pray. As we have seen, he is even more lapidary than Dionysius in his few allusions to the incarnation, and as he neither translates nor quotes the fourth letter and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, he cannot hope for the approbation of modern critics whose case for the orthodoxy of Dionysius is grounded predominantly on these texts (see e.g. Louth 1989). Throughout the present discussion it has been apparent that if we were to adopt the diagnostic proposed by the Lutheran scholar Anders Nygren in his contentious masterpiece *Agape and Eros*.<sup>30</sup> Ficino might fare worse than Dionysius. Nygren distinguishes two roads to salvation, in one of which the soul aspires to free itself from ignorance by fixing its love exclusively on objects that transcend this mutable world, while in the other we accept our finitude as embodied sinners who can come into God's presence only because in his self-abandoning love he has chosen to come among us and suffer at our hands. The first love is Platonic *erôs*, the second Christian *agapê*; the second is the only love that the gospel knows of, the first is the adulterous leaven stealthily infused into the gospel by successive generations of the men whom we call Church Fathers. At Nygren's tribunal Dionysius follows Origen and Gregory of Nyssa to the scaffold, yet his crime seems to consist in no more than a word, since the *erôs* that he extols is not so much our innate aspiration to be like God but the overflowing benignity of God himself which moves him to assume the flesh that would otherwise stand eternally between creature and Creator.<sup>31</sup> Even the answering love of the soul for God<sup>32</sup> in Dionysius is bestowed by an act of grace which, while it certainly presupposes some receptivity on our part, is not reducible to the cultivation of any internal faculty. In Ficino, by contrast, love is not so much a property of God as his power to quicken in us the love that will secure his likeness and hence our immortality. This is undeniably Platonism; it is also Christianity for many who are not such intransigent Lutherans as Nygren. Whatever else it may be, it is the philosophy of a man who, despite his priesthood, found his natural habitat as a teacher not at the pulpit but in an institution which was itself a kind of Platonic academy.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

1. See Hankins 1991a: 267–269; Celenza, on line. Michael Allen points out to me that he read the *Philebus* and *Parmenides* to the ailing Cosimo de Medici.
2. Kristeller 1938, vol. 2: 7–11; Allen 1998: 114.



3. A favourite topic of Augustine also; Michael Allen points out to me that Ficino gave his lectures on the *Philebus* in the church of the Camaldoli fathers, Santa Maria delli Angeli.
4. Monfasani 2002: 187–195. Monfasani also notes a number of censures of Aristotle.
5. Monfasani 2002: 184–186 and 196–199. He observes that Ficino approved of Pletho's rejection of Aristotelian teaching about the soul, but condemned his fatalism and borrowed from him only the claim that Zoroaster was the first theologian.
6. On Ficino's intellectual milieu see further Watts 1987.
7. For a penetrating summary of this, with some reflections on its novelty, see Festugière 1941: 32–37.
8. Allen 1998: 84 and 89 suggests that it was Plotinus (the pagan discoverer of Dionysius, as Ficino opined) who furnished the hermeneutic for the Christian interpretation of Platonism.
9. For the text see Allen 2015, vol. 1: 3ff. I am indebted to Allen's notes throughout this discussion. On genius see Allen 1994: 88.
10. See Allen 2015, vol. 1: xiv, where he cites the unfinished *Commentary on the Letters of Paul* 15.
11. Allen 2015, vol. 1: xv, citing Cicero, *Academics* 1.12.43–46 and *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.5.11, with Augustine, *Against the Academics* 3.17.38–3.18.40.
12. On Ficino and dialectic see Allen, *Synoptic Art*, 149–193, with 151–155 on Plato.
13. See further Allen 1989 on Ficino's elaboration of the contrasts between *eikasia* and *phantasia* in the *Sophist*, where the former term has a less invidious force than in the *Republic*.
14. MT 8.1, citing Plato, *Letters* 2.314a and 7.341c–e.
15. *Mystical Theology* 1; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 252d–e; Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.9; Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.313 etc. See further Louth 2008: 42. at 42.
16. MT 18.1; cf. Augustine, *On the Magnitude of the Soul* 35.79.
17. MT 28.6, alluding to *Parmenides* 137c–142a.
18. Kristeller 1938, vol. 1, cxxv dates the inception of this work to 1491.
19. *Divine Names* 1, in Allen 2015, vol. 1: 91.
20. DN 2, p. 92 Allen. Cf. DN 4.1, p. 98 Allen: *essentia superior*.
21. DN 6.1, p. 100 Allen. Cf. *superessentialitas* in Ficino's own commentary at DN 3.2, p. 94 Allen.
22. DN 3.1, citing *Timaeus* 40e, where *Timaeus* says that we must credit what the descendants of gods tell us of their ancestry.
23. DN 17.9, citing *Statesman* 270b–274a on the cyclic retrogression of history. For references to the *Chaldaean Oracles* and Michael Psellus, both here and in the *Platonic Theology*, see Allen 2015, vol. 1: 472.
24. On Ficino's demonology see Allen 2007: 41–44.
25. Allen 2015, vol. 2: 432 n.14 cites *City of God* 8.16.
26. Allen 2015, vol. 1, xxi–xxii.
27. Allen 2015, vol. 1, xxviii–xxix.
28. See Eusebius of Caesarea, preparation for the Gospel 11.10, 18 and 22.
29. DN 327.2. Ficino substitutes 'sacrifice' for mercy, in keeping with the Latin Church's emphasis on the cross as the means of atonement, but does not reproduce Dionysius' two uses of the name Jesus at DN 327.2. Cf. 57.4, where Christ replaced the Jesus of DN 58. At DN 61.1–2 the equipollence of Christ and the Father is of more concern to Ficino than his

- descent to the flesh as Jesus in the original text of Dionysius at DN 62.3. On the other hand, the reality of Christ's body is affirmed at DN 49.3.
30. Nygren 1953; see also the chapter on Lutheranism by Johannes Zachhuber in this volume.
  31. For the Neoplatonic antecedents of this speculation see *Divine Names* 4.12, pp. 156–158 Suchla; but 1 John 4.8 has a status in Christian thought that cannot be assigned in the Neoplatonic tradition to Proclus' *Commentary on the Alcibiades*.
  32. To which of course there are many incidental references, e.g. at *Divine Names* 1.2, p. 111.2 Suchla. My point concerns the relative salience of the two kinds of love.
  33. See further Hankins 1991: 296–300; Hankins 1991b.

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SECTION IV

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DIONYSIUS  
AFTER THE  
WESTERN EUROPEAN  
REFORMATION

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## CHAPTER 31

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# VALLA AND ERASMUS ON THE DIONYSIAN QUESTION

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DENIS J.-J. ROBICHAUD

## BEFORE VALLA AND ERASMUS: THE DIONYSIAN QUESTION AND THE *SCHOLIA* ON THE *CORPUS DIONYSIACUM*

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It might be tempting to abridge the history of the Dionysian Question by writing it as a story with only two protagonists, Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) and Erasmus (1466–1536). Such a history might begin by explaining how the author of the *Corpus Dionysiicum* was venerated throughout the Middle Ages as St Denis, that is as one saint in three persons—Paul of Tarsus’ convert on the Areopagus mentioned in Acts 17:34 who according to tradition became Bishop of Athens or of Corinth; the author of the *Corpus Dionysiicum*; and the martyred Bishop of Paris responsible for converting Gaul from paganism to Christianity—before Valla and Erasmus heroically ripped these three apart. And just as the titans tore Zagreus to pieces before his resurrection, so too did Valla and Erasmus’ philological sparagmos of Dionysius the Areopagite lead to the rebirth of an altogether different person, baptized as ‘Pseudo’ by Valla in the 1440s. His new name then remained largely a secret until Erasmus published his baptismal register, as it were, printing it first in his edition of Valla’s *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, on 13 April 1505 (under the title *Adnotationes in Novum Testamenti*), and then again in 1516 in his own revised edition of the New Testament, the *Novum Instrumentum*. Erasmus inscribed their collective efforts onto the printed pages of the Bible, adding as an annotation to Acts 17:34, ‘here Lorenzo refutes the opinion of those who think that this Areopagite was the author of these books ... and unless I am mistaken, they make a single Dionysius out of three.’<sup>1</sup>

After the sun had set on the Renaissance, this story might continue, many Catholic theologians persisted in clinging onto the orthodox claim of Dionysius’ apostolic

lineage as the philosopher converted by Paul, later canonized as St Denis, while many Protestant Reformers repeated Luther's accusation that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is dangerous to the faith because it Platonizes more than it Christianizes.<sup>2</sup> Once most of the shouting of the opposing factions subsided it eventually became safe for seventeenth-century scholars such as the Protestant Georg Calixt (1586–1656) and the Catholic Jean Morin (1591–1659) to print the name of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* as Pseudo-Dionysius. Nonetheless, Cardinal Bellarmino (1542–1621) still defended the sainthood of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* by attacking the reputation, character, and faith of Valla and Erasmus: 'Of the other works [of Saint Dionysius] learned men and Catholics have no doubts. Only heretical Lutherans and certain pretenders to knowledge—Erasmus, Valla and a few others—deny that the works named above are by Saint Dionysius the Areopagite.'<sup>3</sup> Some such as Cardinal Bellarmino, therefore, still stubbornly believed in the myth of the corpus's apostolicity until 1895, when Dionysius was confirmed once again with the name 'Pseudo' in the Church of Joseph Stiglmayr and Hugo Koch where his Proclean godparents were finally revealed to the world.<sup>4</sup> This irrefutable philological demonstration of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*'s dependence on Proclus defrocked Dionysius of his apostolic authority leaving him bare, in the words of Eric R. Dodds, as 'the unknown eccentric who within a generation of Proclus's death conceived the idea of dressing his philosophy in Christian draperies and passing it off as the work of a convert of St Paul'.<sup>5</sup> While the outline of such a history is in many respects basically true, the historical details are more complicated and more interesting than the broad narrative.

It is of course true that the scholarly minds of Valla and Erasmus helped tear apart the apostolic vestments holding together the three persons of St Denis, which were first stitched together into a hagiography in the West by Hilduinus in the ninth century and gilded in the East by Georgios Pachymeres in the thirteenth century. It is also true that Erasmus was by far the greatest popularizer of a number of arguments critiquing the myth of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*'s apostolic authority. It is once more true that Erasmus faced numerous conservative Catholic critics for his Dionysian scholarship. This was one of the many commotions caused by the publication in 1516 of his famous editions of Jerome and the *Novum Instrumentum*. But it is equally true that doubts over the authorship and chronology of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* had circulated for quite some time before Valla and Erasmus.

In fact, one of the earliest witnesses of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* doubts its authenticity. During a meeting in Constantinople in 532 between Catholic followers of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 and Severian Monophysites, Hypatius of Ephesus argued that if these writings were truly by Paul's disciple they would have been known to Cyril (c. 376–444) and Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296/98–373).<sup>6</sup> Hypatius further suspected that these texts might have been fabricated by followers of the heretic Apollinaris (d. 382). Despite these doubts, most Byzantine Greeks began calling Dionysius with the epithets 'Great' or 'Divine' as early as Leontius of Byzantium (485–543) and especially after Maximus the Confessor's (c. 580–662) exaltation of Dionysius. A few sceptical voices among Greeks and Syrians still persisted in questioning the *Corpus Dionysiacum*'s authorship. Irenée



Hausherr, for example, lists a number of individuals who reported scepticism about the Dionysian Question, including none other than Photius (c. 810/820–893) and Arethas of Caesarea (ninth century), as well as Euthymius Zigabenus *fl.* (c. 1100), Peter of Damascus (twelfth century), John the Oxite of Antioch (eleventh and twelfth centuries), Joseph Hazzaya (eighth century), and Svimeon, the thirteenth-century Armenian translator of the Georgian translation of Proclus by Joane Petrizi (twelfth century), the latter of whom also claimed that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was dependent on Proclus.<sup>7</sup> In the Latin West, because of conflicting sources in Hilduinus, Bede, and Eusebius, Peter Abelard (c. 1079–1142) explicitly doubted whether St Denis was the same person as Paul's convert. His misgivings could possibly also have implied a corollary doubt, which he never explicitly stated, regarding the third Dionysian person, namely that neither Paul's convert nor St Denis were the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, there was enough information in the *scholia* that circulated in Greek manuscripts of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* to fan the flames of doubt for any suspicious reader. Uncertainties about the identity of Dionysius found their way to John of Scythopolis (c. 536–550) who weighed against them in comments that circulated as manuscript *scholia*, which were eventually attributed to Maximus the Confessor.<sup>9</sup> In particular, in the introductory *scholion* or *Prologue* to the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, the response of John of Scythopolis to the accusation that neither Eusebius (c. 260/5–c. 339/40) nor Origen (c. 185–253) mention Dionysius' books raises the question why these important theologians ignored the supposedly earlier writings of Dionysius.<sup>10</sup> Another part of the introductory material, which Beata Regina Suchla has remarked is an interpolation probably from a marginal note that might have originated in the writings of John Philoponus (*d.* c. 580), connects the author of the corpus to a Platonic context, but inverts the relationship of dependence by fabricating a history of Platonic thievery.<sup>11</sup> This passage even specifically identifies Proclus as the prime suspect of a theft from Dionysius. It then quotes Numenius' (*fl.* second-century CE) claim (found in Eusebius) that Plato is an Atticizing Moses, which is intended to persuade readers that Platonic thievery already began when the school's founder stole from the Hebrews. It further appeals to Basil of Caesarea's (330–379) belief that Platonists, like the Devil, were wont to steal from Christians.

The *Souda* and the introduction of George Pachymeres (1242–c. 1310) to the *Corpus Dionysiacum* further disseminated versions of these doubts after the tenth century.<sup>12</sup> The *Souda* mentions that a certain presbyter Theodorus wished to refute four arguments put forward by anonymous critics of the *Corpus*: i) there is no evidence that these texts circulated among Church Fathers in general; ii) nor in Eusebius's catalogues in particular; iii) the *Corpus* describes Church rites that postdate apostolic times; and iv) the *Corpus* anachronistically refers to a letter by Ignatius. Similarly, Latin translations of the *scholia* by Anastasius Bibliothecarius (c. 810–c. 878) and others, including some attributed to Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168–1253), circulated in the West.<sup>13</sup> In order to understand the Dionysian Question in Valla and Erasmus—and more broadly in the Renaissance—it is important to know that doubts about the authorship of the corpus, even if they were in the minority, existed before them.<sup>14</sup>

As a case in point, some of these suspicions already bothered some of Valla's colleagues. As John Monfasani demonstrated, there was strong interest in the *scholia* on the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in mid-fifteenth-century Rome.<sup>15</sup> Pietro Balbi (1399–1479), a Humanist scholar and eventually a Bishop who travelled in the circles of both Cardinals Cusanus (1401–1464) and Bessarion (1403–1472), translated the introductory *scholion* containing the most damning information for Cusanus himself between January and September 1462.<sup>16</sup> Denis the Carthusian (1402–1471) translated it too. Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c. 1455–1536) printed his version with the false attribution to Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439), the Camaldolese friar of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence who was also a translator of Pseudo-Dionysius. Balbi had already been part of Bessarion's *familia* as early as 1450, and he maintained close ties to Cusanus in the 1460s, when he also translated Proclus' *Platonic Theology* for Cusanus.<sup>17</sup> In a fairly well-known passage from his dialogue the *De non aliud* Cusanus employs Balbi as an interlocutor to voice doubts about Dionysius' chronology because he employs the same terminology as Proclus. Cusanus assuages fears that Dionysius might be later than Proclus by explaining that all wise men, if they are truly wise, end up saying the same thing about the divine first principle and that Plato, whom Proclus followed as though he were a god, must have grasped the substance and nature of reality without revelation and by mind alone. Cusanus must have had his own revelation since he revises his position in the *De venatione sapientiae* soon after studying Balbi's translations of Proclus' *Platonic Theology* and the Greek *scholion* on the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Whereas he first argued that it is uncertain whether Proclus knew Dionysius and that Proclus' terminology and concepts resemble Dionysius because Plato influenced Proclus greatly, he argued just one year later that Proclus must have followed Dionysius. Two of Valla's other Greek colleagues also employed the *scholion* in the mid-Quattrocento to debate the significance of the resemblance between Dionysius' and Proclus' terminology and concepts. The first, George of Trebizond (1395–1484), repeated the *scholion*'s history of Platonic thievery to undermine fifteenth-century Platonic revivals.<sup>18</sup> The second, Cardinal Bessarion, responded to his adversary that if Proclus and Dionysius share notions and terminology it is because they draw from the same source, Plato.<sup>19</sup>

## LORENZO VALLA

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In trying to exorcise the spectre of Neoplatonism from Dionysius, the *scholion* more than hinted at the *Corpus Dionysiacum*'s provenance. Although this line of inquiry spurred Lorenzo Valla's contemporaries to question the Platonism of Dionysian theology, it was *not* the basis of Lorenzo Valla's investigation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Valla put forward a first set of arguments in his comments to the Acts of the Apostles in his *Collatio Actuum Apostolorum* or *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, which he wrote c. 1442–1444 while he was still in Naples.<sup>20</sup> He later revised this text and dedicated it to Pope Nicholas V in 1448, the same year he arrived in Rome, where he continued to work on

his biblical commentary until his death in 1457.<sup>21</sup> Valla had therefore already come to a decision that the writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite were pseudepigraphic before arriving in Rome.

His arguments, which are here translated and numbered for the sake of convenience, were disseminated widely in the final version that Erasmus printed under the title *Novi Testamenti Adnotationes* in 1505:

And although it does not pertain to this work's design, it is not out of place to speak briefly about Dionysius. (1) First, I am amazed at the ignorance of those who wish this person to be a professor of philosophy since he is designated as Areopagita, because clearly [according to them] the Areopagus was a site where philosophers would read aloud and debate, when nearly all authors, not only Greek but Latin ones too, agree that the Areopagus was a site of jurisprudence, and Areopagites were themselves judges, which is an institution that Solon established, like the Roman *Centumviri*. Therefore, Dionysius was an Areopagite, just as some Romans were *Centumviri*. (2) Then, they wish that this greatest of philosophers, to speak like them, proclaimed when the sun was eclipsed at the death of the Lord, 'either the God of nature is suffering or the scaffolding of the cosmos is crumbling,'<sup>22</sup> as though this eclipse's darkness had reached Athens, which no one records, either among the Greeks or among the Latins, as also Jerome demonstrates. For what is claimed is reported as 'the darkness was through the whole land,' just as it is said in the books of Kings that there was famine through the whole land, which certainly means *that land* in particular, and did not mean Media, Persia, India, Italy, Gaul, Germany, and Spain; just as Ambrose too when commenting on Luke, 'An edict was proclaimed by Caesar Augustus to register the whole world,' understands this as the whole Roman world, not the whole earth, of which only a small part was Roman. (3) They add another stupidity to this, namely they think that Dionysius wrote letters about this eclipse to someone, as though it happened in Athens but not in nearby cities. (4) Finally, whether *this* Dionysius wrote something is uncertain; neither Greeks nor Latins before Gregory record any writings. (5) In fact, Gregory does not even specify that it was *that* Areopagite who wrote the books he was consulting. (6) Indeed, in our day some of the most erudite Greeks infer that Apollinaris was the author of these texts.<sup>23</sup>

There is also a noteworthy passage in the earlier *Collatio* that does not find its way into the 1505 edition:

(7) I am saying this so that we do not follow the error of those who think that the work *De Celesti Hierarchia* was written by *this* Dionysius, which does not appear to be ancient and reveals itself to be the work of a philosopher.<sup>24</sup>

Valla's arguments reveal the same philological, historical, and critical prowess with which he famously debunked the forged Donation of Constantine. His criticism is directed at three targets: the *Corpus Dionysiacum* itself, the traditional legends identifying Dionysius the Areopagite as its author, and misinterpretations of the Bible.

Valla's first argument (1) is that the Areopagus should not be understood as another philosophical schools in Athens, like the Academy, Lyceum, Stoa Poikile, or the Epicurean garden. Specifically, it was where trials were held in courts before tribunals of judges. Therefore, when Dionysius is called Areopagite in Acts 17:34 it does not designate him as part of a philosophical school but as one of the Athenian judges. Here, Valla is critiquing an anachronistic reading of the Bible just as much as a later legend about Dionysius. To drive the point home to his Humanist audience, Valla compares the institution to the ancient Roman office of the *Decemviri*. What Valla infers with all of this is, first, that the received tradition that the person named Dionysius the Areopagite in Acts was a philosopher who converted to Christianity is inaccurate since he was really a judge, and second, a judge would not have written works of theology so infused with philosophy like the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Therefore, Dionysius the Areopagite should not be identified as the author of the corpus.

Valla then takes aim in his second argument (2) at a traditional understanding of the Dionysian legend that he would have known from the Roman breviary, namely that Dionysius is supposed to have proclaimed 'either the God of nature is suffering or the scaffolding of the cosmos is crumbling' when an eclipse occurred during the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Valla thinks that this is nonsense since it presupposes that the eclipse was seen from Athens, where Valla implies Dionysius was at the time. Presumably, following Valla's reasoning, the author of such a false legend made this claim on two grounds: on the seventh letter to Polycarp of the *Corpus*, which speaks about this eclipse, and on biblical testimony that darkness spread throughout the land.<sup>25</sup> According to Valla there are two problems with this. First, there are no ancient witnesses providing evidence that the eclipse enveloped the whole world in darkness. Second, Jerome (c. 347–420) and Ambrose (c. 340–397) are proof that interpreting the biblical expression 'universa terra' to mean 'the whole world' goes against the *usus scribendi* of the Bible.<sup>26</sup> Clearly, 'universa terra' means only the place where Jesus was crucified. To support this argument Valla adds a corollary argument (3), that the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* corroborates his story by falsifying letters about the eclipse under the pseudonym Dionysius the Areopagite, which this forger then also purports were sent by Dionysius from Athens to his contemporaries in neighbouring cities. Valla points out a thoughtless contradiction in the story: the forger, writing under the pseudonym Dionysius, informs his correspondent about the eclipse, as though it were visible only in Athens, which would go against the legendary claim that the eclipse's shadow covered the whole earth.

In his fourth (4) and fifth (5) arguments, Valla observes that he knows of neither any Greek nor Latin author before Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) who mentions the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, but even then, Gregory's writings are ambiguous whether the Dionysius who authored the texts in question is the same person as Dionysius the Areopagite. Valla later repeats this claim in his *Encomion S. Thomae Aquinatis* of 1457, which he had been asked to deliver on Thomas Aquinas' (1225–1274) feast day at the Dominican Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome.<sup>27</sup> The encomnium crescendos in a sardonic and fearless praise that takes aim at Thomas' rising theological authority among his

ever-growing followers. Latins and Greeks sing in pairs in Valla's heavenly choirs: John of Damascus (c. 675–749) is matched with Thomas, whom Valla describes sarcastically as banging cymbals in the back of the choir, probably to symbolize the kind of inelegant clash of philosophy and theology that one finds in Dionysius and Thomas. Valla launches Dionysius into the heavens too, and pairs him off with Gregory the Great:

Gregory is with Dionysius, whom they call the Areopagite, because he is the first among the Latins, as far as I can tell, who mentions him, for the works of Dionysius were unknown not only among the Latins but also the Greeks whom I mentioned above [i.e. Ambrose, Basil, Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, and John Chrysostom].<sup>28</sup>

The rhetorical effect of Valla's encomium diminishes the stature of both the Doctor Angelicus and the Areopagite. It is possible that Cusanus might have begun to digest Valla's arguments. Cusanus wrote a note in his manuscript of Athanasius reminding himself to investigate whether Athanasius wrote about Dionysius the Areopagite because Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome seem to ignore him, while only Gregory and John of Damascus mention him.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding his sixth argument (6), Valla neither elaborates nor specifies which contemporary Greeks dare to replace the apostolic authorship of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* with the heretical Apollinaris. Although Valla remains silent, Monfasani has demonstrated that the Greek scholar in question is none other than Theodore Gaza (c. 1398–c. 1475)—a Byzantine colleague of Valla, Balbi, and Bessarion's who taught Greek in Italy, translated ancient Greek works, and participated in the Council of Ferrara-Florence before working for Popes Nicholas V and Sixtus IV.<sup>30</sup> Gaza's identity is confirmed in a letter written by Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1470–1533) to Giampietro Carafa, the future Pope Paul IV, defending the apostolic authorship of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* against the specific attacks of Valla and Gaza.<sup>31</sup> Although Gaza wrote to Pope Nicholas V in his preface to his translation of Pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias's *Problemata* that he thought that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was a forgery, as Monfasani argues, he did not publish his arguments out of fear of offending his patrons Pope Nicholas V and Cardinal Bessarion.<sup>32</sup> Valla also does not specify which Apollinaris he had in mind, but it should have been obvious to all that he meant none other than the fourth-century Apollinaris of Laodicea whose teachings were condemned at the Council of Constantinople of 381. After all, this attribution had a long history, apparently going as far back as Hypatius of Ephesus. The Apollinarian origins of the corpus is also documented elsewhere, including in an attribution by Ephraim, the sixth-century patriarch of Antioch, as recorded by Photius, and most importantly in John of Scythopolis' *scholia* to the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.<sup>33</sup> Although there are precedents for attributing the corpus to Apollinaris of Laodicea and despite the fact Valla never claims this attribution as his own, Valla's later opponents nonetheless accused him of inventing the Apollinarian authorship and criticized him for not specifying which Apollinaris he had in mind. In any case, Valla and Gaza most likely knew of the attribution to Apollinaris from the *scholia* on

the corpus, and this attribution is the most substantial link between the older 'Greek' Byzantine traditions of doubts and Valla's new 'Latin' arguments.

The final (7) argument from Valla's first *Collatio* is based on Valla's philological acumen. In this brief note, Valla reveals that he detects anachronistic language in the *De coelesti hierarchia*, just as he had sniffed out incriminating anachronisms in the Donation of Constantine. Valla states that this Dionysian work does not seem as ancient as it purports to be—literally that it does not taste of antiquity (*nec antiquitatem sapit*)—and that it looks like the work of a philosopher, which in turn contradicts his argument (1) that Dionysius the Areopagite was a judge. One wonders what Valla would have done had he spent time comparing the terminology of Proclus and Dionysius as Pietro Balbi began to do. Presumably an analysis of the technical Neoplatonic terms employed by the *Corpus Dionysiacum* would have further advanced his philological arguments and might have unlocked new possible identifications with Proclean Platonism.

## ERASMUS

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Before and even after 1505, when he published Valla's answer to the Dionysian Question, Erasmus wrote positively about the content of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. For example, in his *Antibarbari*, which he composed when he was not yet twenty-years old (c. 1494–1495, published in 1520), Erasmus not only writes that Dionysius was just as eloquent as learned, he specifically says that he was Paul's disciple. Moreover, in his *Enchiridion militis christiani*, which he composed around 1501–1502 and published in 1503, Erasmus is sympathetic to Dionysius' allegoresis, and situates the *De divinis nominibus* in the same hermeneutic tradition as Paul, Augustine, Origen, Plato, and the Pythagoreans. He makes similar claims in his *Ratio seu methodus* (1518). Even in his *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516, a work that propagated the refutation of Dionysius' apostolic identity far and wide, and in his *Apologia ad Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensem*, he states that there is no mention of marriage as a sacrament in the *De coelesti hierarchia* in order to formulate an argument that is presumably based on the text's antiquity. In his *Institutio principis Christiani* (1516) he defends the symmetry of the Dionysian celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Although Erasmus still discusses the content of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in these examples from 1516, he no longer acknowledges either St Paul's disciple or St Denis as its author. Erasmus continued to uphold a similar position in 1526 when he fought off the attacks of Noël Beda (d. 1537) and the faculty of theology in Paris. Against their censures, he answered that even if he were to disbelieve that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was written by the Areopagite convert, '[he] would not be condemning the books [i.e. the *Corpus Dionysiacum*], but would be doubting their author'.<sup>34</sup>

Erasmus had begun to make up his mind about the *Corpus Dionysiacum* long before 1516. In the aforementioned assessment of Dionysian allegoresis in the *Enchiridion militis christiani*, Erasmus hints at the fact that he has reservations about the work's authorship, writing that 'a certain person named Dionysius (*Dionysius quidam*)



propounds about a certain art in the book *De divinis nominibus*.<sup>35</sup> Erasmus' qualifier 'quidam' is by no means insignificant since it shows that, although Erasmus often passed the blame—or ironic praise—for debunking the Dionysian legend to Valla, he was hatching doubts about the Dionysian Question before he discovered the manuscript of Valla's *Collatio Novi Testamenti* in 1504 at the Premonstratensian Abbey of Parc. When Erasmus finally broke publically with the tradition of Dionysian apostolicity in 1516, his fledgling doubts, which Valla's demonstrations had nourished for a dozen years, had matured into fully grown convictions.

Erasmus never backed down after 1516. In the *Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam*, which was first published with his 1519 edition of the New Testament (with further additions in 1520), Erasmus echoes his statements in the *Enchiridion* that:

before [Augustine], I suppose, a certain Dionysius [taught certain interpretive methods] in the work that he entitled *On the Divine Names*, again in the little book to which he gave the title *On Mystical Theology*—and it is probable that he did so in the books of *Theological Institutes* and again in the work *On Symbolic Theology*.<sup>36</sup>

Erasmus' scepticism about the *Corpus* peeks out from behind his ironic use of 'I suppose' and 'a certain Dionysius', as well as his qualification 'it is probable' for two other works mentioned in the *Corpus Dionysiaca* that have not survived, the existence of which Erasmus might have been harbouring doubts.

In the *Peregrinatio apostolorum Petri et Paulum cum ratione temporum*, which first appeared as a preface to his *Paraphrase on Acts* (1524), Erasmus restates Valla's arguments that Paul's convert Dionysius was a judge and not a philosopher, but he also draws on the authority of Eusebius, and probably on the *Souda* or Photius. Erasmus expresses further disbelief about the Dionysian legends:

I am at a loss to imagine why Bede makes this Dionysius, bishop of the Corinthians, for in Eusebius a certain Dionysius, bishop of the Corinthians, informs us that Dionysius the Areopagite was ordained bishop in Athens by Paul himself. Indeed, it is quite possible that Dionysius the Areopagite left no writings at all, since in Eusebius the books of Dionysius, bishop of the Corinthians, are so carefully reviewed, while no mention anywhere is made of the written works of the Areopagite.<sup>37</sup>

Erasmus saved his strongest criticism of the *Corpus Dionysiaca* for two works published in 1516: the *Novum Instrumentum* and his edition of Jerome. Valla had inserted his examination of the Dionysian Question into his biblical criticism and Erasmus followed suit, publishing his remarks about Dionysius the Areopagite in his annotation to Acts 17:34. His comments initially appear in the first edition of the *Novum Instrumentum* (1516), but he subsequently added new evidence and arguments in the 1519, 1527, and 1535 editions. We translate Erasmus' complete annotation, as printed in Reeve and Screech's annotated facsimile.<sup>38</sup> For the sake of clarity we preserve their



system of brackets to indicate variants in the {1519}, (1527), and [1535] editions. To facilitate cross-referencing with Erasmus' 1505 publication of Valla's *Novi Testamenti Adnotationes*, we indicate adaptations of Valla's arguments with the same Arabic numerals employed above, and identify Erasmus's new contributions with Roman numerals.

Here Lorenzo refutes the opinion of those who think that this Areopagite was the author of those books that have come down to us with the titles *De Hierarchiis* and *De divinis nominibus* as well as the same Dionysius who was crowned a martyr in Paris, and unless I am mistaken they make a single Dionysius out of three. (1) First of all, the Areopagites were judges and not philosophers. But these people claim that Dionysius was the greatest philosopher, and (2) from an eclipse of the sun, discerned that the nature of things capsized, when there is no consensus that this darkness even reached Athens. For the Evangelist says that shadows were cast over the whole land (*universam terram*), and St Jerome corroborates that 'terram' was understood as *that region*, {and (i) Origen asserts this too in the homilies he wrote on Matthew, where he clearly negates that these shadows occurred because of an eclipse of the sun, but either because of interceding clouds, or some other gathering of dense air.} For, if these shadows were of such a magnitude to cover the entire globe (*universum orbem*), then surely some Latin or Greek writer would have recorded this event. (3) Lorenzo already made fun of the letter on this phenomenon that was forged under the name Dionysius. (ii) It seems to me that in those ancient times the Christian ceremonies did not exist to the extent that he described them. (4) Finally, it would be extraordinary if such an ancient author who wrote so much existed but was not cited by any of the ancient Latin or Greek authors, {for he is not cited by (iii) Origen nor by Chrysostom}, nor indeed by Jerome, who leaves nothing untouched. In fact, Gregory is the first person to provide evidence by citing his writings, (5) but he does not indicate that he was Dionysius the Areopagite. ((iv) But then again, since in the *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius often mentions the books of Dionysius the Bishop of Corinth, it is unlikely for him to remain silent about such a great disciple of Paul, especially if he were to have left behind such a great body of writings.) (v) In his *Catalogue of Illustrious Writers*, Jerome reviews both persons named Dionysius, but does not review their books. (6) Lorenzo states that in his day there were some most learned men who thought that the books were written by Apollinaris. {(vi) Although Jerome records two individuals with this name, the first was the Bishop of Hierapolis, who flourished under M. Antonius; the second was the Bishop of Laodicea in Syria. However, he does not attribute any of these writings whatsoever to them. Nor do I imagine that they ought to be attributed to the heretic Apollinaris. (vii) Many years ago, as I recall, when the incomparable William Grocyn, the greatest theologian who was learned and skilled in all disciplines, was in the process of lecturing on the *Celestial Hierarchy* at St Paul's Cathedral in London, he strongly asserted in his prepared introduction that this work was by Dionysius the Areopagite, and spit rage at the impudence of those who disagreed. But before he made it halfway through the work, when he began to examine it more carefully, he frankly and openly confessed to his audience that due to contrary reasons the work did not seem to him anymore to be by Dionysius the Areopagite.} ((viii) I am also stunned that Bede thought for

some reason or another that this Dionysius was made Bishop of Corinth, since in the *Ecclesiastical History* he clearly shows that Dionysius Bishop of Corinth was someone else who wrote many works. But his authority is cited there, in a certain letter that he wrote to the Athenians, to show that the Dionysius the Areopagite who was converted by Paul was the first bishop of Athens and was made bishop by this same apostle. Nothing else whatsoever among the ancient authors is relevant to the study of Dionysius the Areopagite.) But this little appendix, as it were, is enough to demonstrate this.<sup>39</sup>

Giving credit where credit is due, Erasmus elaborates on Valla's six key arguments from the *Collatio Novi Testamenti*. When he composed this material Erasmus was in the throes not only of editing the New Testament but also of publishing what would eventually become a staggeringly long list of patristic editions. It is therefore to be expected that most of Erasmus' new contributions consist of citing new authorities among the Church Fathers to support Valla's original arguments. In his 1519 edition, he cites Origen (i) in argument (1) as evidence to support Valla's appeal to Jerome to explain that *universa terra* did not mean the whole globe for the ancients. He refers to Origen once more along with (iii) Chrysostom and Jerome in argument (4) as evidence that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was unknown before Gregory. Similarly, in 1527 (iv) he turns to Eusebius' long lists of bishops in the *Ecclesiastical History* to argue that there is no evidence either that Dionysius the Areopagite has a place in apostolic succession or that his writings existed in Eusebius' day. He notes that there is also no relevant evidence (v) in Jerome's *Catalogues of Illustrious Writers*. In preparation for the 1527 edition, Erasmus must have been studying the lists of bishops in Church historians since he further records (viii) the confusion surrounding the different persons named Dionysius in Bede. Regarding Valla's sixth argument, Erasmus disapproves of the attribution to Apollinaris of Laodicea (vi), but also takes the time to cite Jerome to clarify any possible confusion among the two ancient bishops called Apollinaris.

In addition to expanding the list of sources who either omit or confuse the identity of Dionysius the Areopagite, Erasmus makes two new important points. The first (ii) consists of a short judgement that 'it seem to me that in those ancient times the Christian ceremonies did not exist to the extent that he described them'. Although Erasmus does not expand on this statement, its implicit critique of the contemporary belief that holy rites—e.g. for the priesthood, monasticism, liturgy, and the sacraments—already existed in the primitive Church drew the attention of his Catholic critics and provided them with ammunition to call Erasmus a Lutheran. Some of his contemporaries severely critiqued him for publishing these arguments but, as he was often quick to state, not only were the arguments true, they were not just his own.

Erasmus' mention (vii) of his recently deceased friend, William Grocyn (c. 1446–1519), in his 1519 edition is the second notable contribution that should be explained. Erasmus recounts that Grocyn began his public lectures on the *Corpus Dionysiacum* at St Paul's Cross in London defending the apostolic authorship of Dionysius the Areopagite only to change his mind mid-course in his expositions. Erasmus even clarifies in one of

his defences against his censures by the Paris faculty of theology, the *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae vulgatas*, that Grocyn's defence of Dionysius the Areopagite was initially directed at Valla.<sup>40</sup> Examining Erasmus and Thomas More's (1478–1535) evidence for Grocyn's public recantation, Joseph B. Trapp (1996) called into question Erasmus' credibility. First, while More does indeed mention Grocyn's Dionysian lectures in London in November 1501, according to Trapp, he 'gives no hint that it has been or is to be interrupted, or of a revolutionary character'.<sup>41</sup> Second, although Grocyn eventually owned a copy of Valla's *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, Trapp maintains that it is extremely unlikely that Grocyn would have had access to Valla's arguments in 1501 since Valla's work seems to have been unknown outside Italy before its rediscovery by Erasmus in 1504.<sup>42</sup> Although Trapp's first point is undeniable, his second argument warrants comments. Even if one concedes that Valla's work did not circulate widely, especially outside Italy, one should not completely dismiss possible contemporary knowledge of it. For one thing, Grocyn, who like Valla annotated the New Testament and also owned a number of works by Valla and had travelled to Italy in 1488 to study Latin and Greek with Demetrius Chalcondyles (1423–1511) and Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494), might have read or heard about Valla's arguments at that time, or again could have learned that other mid-Quattrocento scholars studied the Dionysian Question intensely. For another, we know that Valla's *Collatio Novi Testamenti* made it as far north as the Premonstratensian Parc Abbey outside of Leuven, where Erasmus found it in 1504. However, if Grocyn had access to Valla's work by then, presumably Erasmus could have known of its existence too. Moreover, even if one believes Erasmus' explanation that Grocyn did in fact openly doubt the authorship of the corpus before Erasmus published Valla's *Collatio* in 1505, there is no other known evidence indicating the reasons behind Grocyn's arguments, other than another later work by Erasmus in which he claims that Grocyn had previously critiqued Valla's demonstration that the corpus was pseudepigraphic. Without the new discovery of still unknown testimonies of Grocyn's studies in Italy or of his Dionysian lectures it is impossible to corroborate Erasmus' claim about Grocyn's knowledge of Valla.

However, since it is possible to identify many other books that Grocyn had at his disposal, it is also possible to reconstruct what he could have learned from these sources. As previously mentioned, Valla is not the only source of doubts on the *Corpus Dionysiacum*; the manuscript *scholia* supplied ample reasons to nurture the seeds of doubt in anyone who might already have reservations about the *Corpus*. First and foremost, there are at least two surviving manuscripts of the Greek text of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* owned by Grocyn.<sup>43</sup> One of these two manuscripts contains the introductory *scholion* attributed to Philoponus, which includes quotations from Basil, Eusebius, and Numenius, and the accusation that Proclus and the Platonists stole from Dionysius.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Grocyn's library reveals that he was enormously interested in the Neoplatonists since he owned a number of manuscripts of Proclus (as well as Plotinus and Damascius). As far as we know, there is no evidence that he tested the *scholion's* claims by conducting a philological comparison between Dionysius and late ancient Platonists but it is still worth remarking that he had an abundance of texts at his disposal to do so.<sup>45</sup> In short, even if

one concludes that Erasmus' recollection of Grocyn's knowledge of Valla's conclusions about Dionysius is inadmissible, it would certainly not have been unreasonable for Grocyn to have arrived at his own conclusions about the Dionysian Question independently from Valla, perhaps by reading the *scholia*, which were widely available to him, and perhaps by studying his library of Neoplatonic texts. If Erasmus insinuated that he himself had reservations about the attribution of the corpus to Dionysius the Areopagite when he referred to its author as 'Dionysius quidam' in 1503, i.e. before he found Valla's *Collatio Novi Testamenti* in 1504, who is to say that Grocyn needed Valla's *Collatio* to change his mind too? This reconstruction is merely an untested hypothesis that would need to be confirmed with further evidence. In any case, even if Grocyn were to have pursued a Platonic line of inquiry into the Dionysian Question, Erasmus does not examine Pseudo-Dionysius's Platonism. Instead, as is now clear, Erasmus' approach to the Dionysian Question builds on Valla's biblical and patristic studies. And like Valla, Erasmus drew inspiration for this kind of religious scholarship from Jerome.

Justifying his identification of some works as spurious in the preface to the first part of volume two of his edition of Jerome (1516), Erasmus delivers a master class on humanistic philological criticism of pseudepigraphies and forgeries. His rhetorical strategy is clear and precise. Following a brief praise of Jerome, Erasmus argues that it is necessary to edit Jerome because spuria are mixed into his works. Erasmus tries to disarm his critics by teaching his readers how forgeries are fabricated: 'my intention being first to set forth the causes that give rise to such spuria and secondly to demonstrate the signs and inferential evidence by which false attribution may be detected'.<sup>46</sup> All great ancient authors contain spuria, and Jerome is no exception. To prove this rule, Erasmus cites a number of examples, including Homer, Orpheus, Aesop, Hesiod, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, the so-called epistles of Phalaris, Plautus, Varro, Cicero, Virgil, Boethius, and the supposed correspondence between Seneca and Paul. Erasmus then proceeds, perhaps more perilously, to document examples of spuria in Scriptures. He prudently does not speak in the first person, but provides examples of ancient Christians who harboured doubts about the books of Judith, Esther, Tobit, Wisdom, the Letter to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse of John, Paul's Letter to the Laodiceans, the Letter of James, and the Second Letter of Peter. As is to be expected, Erasmus begins this long list of critics with his scholarly hero, Jerome: 'St Jerome himself delivers a finishing stroke to many passages in Daniel with an obelisk. He rejects completely the third and fourth books of Ezra as apocryphal'.<sup>47</sup> Erasmus is not interested in critiquing any of these texts in particular, so much as reviving Jerome's ethos of scholarly criticism. In other words, Erasmus appeals to Jerome's philology as a precedent for his own criticism of Jerome and the Bible. It is even on Jerome's authority that Erasmus concludes that Christians are greater culprits of fabricating forgeries than pagans! 'He who desires may read Jerome's *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers*, he may read others who give us a similar account, and he will find that this kind of false attribution of books was not only more common but also more shameless among Christians than it was among pagans'.<sup>48</sup> By making his case so bluntly Erasmus probably anticipated and perhaps even courted his future opponents.

Erasmus continues his lesson, proposing a simple typology for spuria: some are fabricated by ignorance, others by design. Erasmus explains at length how the first type of spuria arise: copyists and students group various texts on similar topics in the same volume; texts bound together might be ascribed to the first author in the collection; an author's name might be erased in a manuscript containing multiple authors; readers might conjecture about a text's authorship when none is found; similar styles are confused; and ancient declamations written in the persona of someone else might later be accepted falsely as authentic. Often the confusion of two authors with the same or similar names is the cause of error. For example, Aulus Gellius explains that Plautus was confused with Plautius. So too, Erasmus clarifies by referring to Jerome, certain letters by John the Presbyter were falsely attributed to the Apostle John. Erasmus concludes by appealing to no authority but his own, 'and we attribute the books of the *Hierarchies* to Dionysius the Areopagite and accept the opinion that identifies him with the person who, we understand, won a martyr's crown near the city of Paris, thus creating a single Dionysius out of three, unless I am mistaken.'<sup>49</sup> But this is not the whole story. Erasmus actually thinks that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is of the second type of spuria, namely those fabricated by design. In other words, Erasmus is convinced that the attribution of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* to Dionysius the Areopagite is not due to an old confusion between different persons named Dionysius but because the corpus is the work of a deceitful impostor.

To clarify why someone might deliberately circulate pseudepigrapha Erasmus explains that unscrupulous booksellers might fabricate a text or attribute it to an authoritative source to drive up their profits, or impostors might create pseudonyms to advance their cause:

they cloak their designs under influential names in their attempt either to commend to their reader their nonsense and baneful ideas or to enhance the advantage they hold over others' stupidity or to promote swifter and wider circulation in the community for their doctrinal poison under the cover of an important name.<sup>50</sup>

Erasmus concludes that it is for these reasons that Christians are greater forgers. As examples, he mentions how works circulated under the names of Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. It is clear that Erasmus thinks the *Corpus Dionysiacum* belongs in this category too. First, despite mentioning the *Corpus Dionysiacum* while discussing spuria resulting from an ignorant confusion of names, Erasmus very clearly endorses Valla's argument in his annotation to Acts 17:34 (3) that an impostor forged letters under the persona of Dionysius the Areopagite. For example, he invents a story about the miraculous eclipse at the crucifixion of Christ specifically to dupe stupid readers with a false narrative in order to drape his theological writings with apostolic garments. Second, embellishing the image that forgeries conceal poison, Erasmus advises scholars who might have doubts about a text as follows:

You are not satisfied with the label on a physician's pillbox, but you sniff, handle, and taste the contents; nor do you at once believe the unguent to be balsam if the unguent

jar is so labelled. Instead you take every precaution not to be fooled by a label and receive poison in place of medicine and mud in place of ointment ... But there may be an objection. What is so important about whose name is on a book, provided it is a good book? Perhaps in the case of Plautus's plays it may not be so important. In the case of sacred writers and pillars of the church, however, from whom popes and theologians derive as from oracles their teachings on war, on the sacraments, and on the most serious matters, it will be, I think, of the greatest importance.<sup>51</sup>

The *Corpus Dionysiacum*, supposedly authored by one of the apostolic pillars of the Church (*ecclesiae column*) falls into this category. Erasmus did not yet overtly say that the corpus contained doctrinal poison. He measured his words more carefully, but his critics believed they were able to see through his veiled conclusions, and employed his rhetoric to accuse him of selling his own false philological poison to combat Dionysius' true apostolic medicine.

A simple request by Konrad Resch to the parliament and to Noël Bédà (c. 1470–1537), syndic of the faculty of theology of Paris, to reprint Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Luke* (1523) snowballed into a controversy involving the parliament and king and concluded in the Sorbonne's full examination of all of Erasmus' writings in 1527.<sup>52</sup> The storm enveloped all of Erasmus' works but we need only concern ourselves with the Sorbonne's censures of his conclusions on Dionysius the Areopagite. Erasmus first tried to mitigate privately Bédà's censorship, but by February 1526 he protested directly to the faculty of theology that he was unfairly censured. Fearing that he ignored all the reasons why he was being condemned, he nonetheless tried to defend himself in an apologia entitled *Divinationes*, in which he carefully avoided responding to Bédà's criticism that he questioned the apostolic origins of Dionysian ecclesiology and liturgy. Erasmus was also not completely forthcoming in responding that although he is unconvinced that this Dionysius the Areopagite was Paul's convert, he should not be blamed for reporting the conclusions of others.<sup>53</sup> Valla had claimed that the *Celestial Hierarchy* (7) does not seem to be as old as it purports, but it is Erasmus himself, as seen above in the annotation (ii) to Acts 17:34, who published that the religious rites in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* were anachronistic (unless Grocyn did so too in his lectures). Bédà escalated the quarrel and published his *Annotationes* on Erasmus' *Paraphrases* of the Bible in May of the same year, claiming that Erasmus' conclusions and humanistic methods amounted to Lutheranism.

In June, Erasmus appealed to both king and parliament, who in turn requested in July that the theology faculty resolve the controversy. Once again Erasmus tried to defend himself in print with his *Elenchus*, a list of erroneously censored passages, which he sent to parliament and the king who finally forbid the sale of Bédà's *Annotationes*. In this work, Erasmus adopts a similar strategy, stating that he is merely reporting that 'there were and still are scholars who have doubts about Dionysius', and that 'even if I were to be of the same opinion how is this an offence to the faith? I would not be condemning the books [i.e. the *Corpus Dionysiacum*], but would be doubting their author'.<sup>54</sup> How could he and Valla be Lutherans, Erasmus protests, when he and Valla arrived at their conclusions about the *Corpus Dionysiacum* before Luther critiqued Dionysius?



Even with the king's support Erasmus prudently kept his guard up since the theology faculty was unrelenting in their investigation of his writings. In August 1526, he published a comprehensive defence, the *Prologus in supputationem calumniarum Natalis Bedae*, followed in 1527 by the *Supputatio*, an account of all of Bédā's '81 lies, 510 calumnies, and 47 blasphemies'.<sup>55</sup> Bédā zeroed in on comments Erasmus wrote about Dionysius in his *Preface* to I Corinthians and fired two objections:

*Proposition 157*: Concerning the early beginnings of the Church, I'm amazed that there is nearly nothing recorded in this graver history that you can safely believe.

*Proposition 158*: Dionysius, who in the second *Hierarchy*, i.e. the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, describes in sufficiently rich detail the ancient rites of the Church, seems to some recent scholars to be someone else than that Areopagite.

Erasmus first responds in the *Prologus*, but develops a longer version in the *Supputatio*:

*Supputatio*: Since we responded to this in the *Elenchus* we will count this as twin pieces of slander. Concerning the first [prop. 157], although it has the title ENORMOUS ERRORS in huge capital letters before the proposition, it does not reveal any error at all, and I think it is superlatively true, unless Bédā is advancing a history that contradicts canonical scriptures, in which I suspect nothing is false. In the second calumny [prop. 158] that he connects to this, Bédā interprets my expression 'scholars' as Lutherans and Schismatics, proliferators of ancient errors and inventors of new ones. In fact, he says that it is they who disparage ancient rites and teachings. Again and again I ask this directly to Bédā. When I first wrote those things in Leuven, Luther's opinions about Dionysius did not yet exist. How then could I have meant 'Lutherans' and 'Luther' when I wrote 'scholars'? Then, he cannot ignore the persons I have in mind since in my *Annotations*, in the passage that Clichtove cites, I name the most erudite theologian William Grocyn and Lorenzo Valla. Finally, Bédā here imputes to them condemning the rites and disparaging the teachings of the Church—where, I pray, do they aim at this? Did I say anything like this in my writings? Not one peep. On the contrary, I sometimes deplore our age as having fallen away from ancient times, and on occasion I wish to return to those simple rites of the ancient Church, but I have never condemned Church ceremonies.<sup>56</sup>

The matter did not end here. An anonymous tract defending Erasmus gave Bédā a pretext to inaugurate formal proceedings in the theology faculty to investigate Erasmus. The faculty voted on specific censures and the official condemnation came on 17 December 1527, but this was not made public until 1531 and 1532.<sup>57</sup> They accepted the circular logic of Bédā's censure of the Dionysian Question:

*Title 31*. Concerning Dionysius the Areopagite. Erasmus' Proposition in the Preface to his Paraphrase of Corinthians I.

Dionysius, who in the second *Hierarchy*, i.e. the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, describes in sufficiently rich detail the ancient rites of the Church, seems to some recent scholars to be someone else than that Areopagite.



*Censure:* It is not according to scholars but according to audacious and zealous persons eager for novelty that Dionysius the Areopagite is not the author of the books called the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, seeing that it is established by Dionysius the Areopagite himself that they were written by him: first by the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* itself, and by other books by this same author; then this fact is corroborated by the testimony of the most famous men; and finally, it is made all the more clear in the seventh general synod, in which Dionysius is called 'Great', that he wrote the books on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.<sup>58</sup>

Erasmus quickly wrote his most important defence, the *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae sub nomine facultatis theologiae Parisiensis vulgatas*, which he published in March 1532:

*Declaration 91:* I long ago settled the controversy over this preface, and although I established it with just a few words, under the name of others, I remained silent when provoked by Josse Clichtove's biting attacks, not because I do not have any arguments, but because I believed that this conflict was not very pertinent either to the business of faith or to piety. Someone else easily examined that argument, which they think is irrefutable, namely they are convinced that this mishmash of books was written by the Areopagite. He would say that the person who wrote these books, undertook with great care that his writings would seem as though they were by that Great Dionysius. This fabrication would not seem absurd, since at that time all kinds of writings that were entrusted with false titles of famous men burst out everywhere. Pious men were persuaded back then, and it pleased God if such a poison aroused the multitude with a desire to read these books. And then they say that no one would doubt [Dionysius's authorship] unless they were unlearned or audacious. I ignore what they think about Lorenzo Valla, and I am not concerned with what they think about me. In any case, I can put forward this one person who cannot be described as ignorant and audacious. He is the Englishman William Grocyn—a man who, while he was alive, lived a life that was most serious and virtuous, and so observant to the decrees of the Church, nearly to the point of superstition, superbly learned in scholastic theology, and endowed by nature with the sharpest judgement, and especially well versed in all the disciplines. Before his thirtieth birthday Grocyn began to preach on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* from the holy pulpit of St Paul's in London, and in his preface he fulminated against those who denied that the author of these books was the Areopagite, meaning, I believe, Lorenzo Valla. But having then lectured for a few weeks, he examined the mind of this author more closely and carefully and did not hesitate to utter a palinode for his prior opinion to the same audience, proclaiming to them that this author did not seem in any way to be Dionysius the Areopagite. Since the memory of Grocyn is still fresh on our mind, I can be easily refuted, if what I say is a lie. Finally, he can be called 'Great', even if he is not Paul's disciple. For Basil is called 'Great,' as are many others.<sup>59</sup>

In his summation of the Dionysian Question, Erasmus briefly mentions Josse Clichtove (c. 1472–1543), Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples's student who taught at the humanistic Collège du Cardinal Lemoine before joining Béda at the Sorbonne. Five chapters of the first book

of Clichtove's *Antilutherus* (1524) target Valla's and Erasmus's conclusions on Dionysius. Although he tries at length to beat Erasmus at his own game by building a historical and philological case for the apostolic authorship of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, his efforts amount to circular arguments for the authenticity of the corpus from evidence in the corpus itself. Erasmus passes over the intricacies of the arguments, calling instead on the posthumous help of Valla and Grocyn to shield him from his censors, but there is no evidence that either had ever critiqued the *Corpus Dionysiacum* for the specific reason for which Erasmus was being censored, namely, as he declared in the *Novum Instrumentum* (the claim is also in the *Souda*), Erasmus concluded that the apostolic Church and its rituals did not resemble what is purported in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.

## CONCLUSION

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Erasmus' rhetorical strategy is understandable. Times had changed since Erasmus first doubted the *Corpus Dionysiacum*'s authorship, and religious conflicts had raised the stakes of the Dionysian Question. Because Luther had spoken on the question Erasmus felt compelled to remind his critics that he was not following Luther because, like Valla and Grocyn, he reached his conclusion before the reformer. To his critics this was no better than boasting of being faster at making mistakes. But to Erasmus it was the only narrow path between two errors: Lutheranism and believing the lies of the anonymous forger of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Erasmus' defence was a public declaration that he was wedded neither to Luther nor to Paris, but to a new kind of scholarship inspired by the *bonae litterae*.

Clichtove's *Antilutherus* was another sign that times had changed. Jean-Pierre Massaut discovered in a Parisian manuscript a 1517 tract by Clichtove entitled *Quod opera Dionysio attributa, sint Dionysii Areopagite et non alterius* that became the template for his 1524 *Antilutherus*. Free from the pressures either to follow Bédæ and the Sorbonne's campaign against Erasmus, or to respond to Lutherans, the 1517 tract contains signs of respect and friendship for Erasmus, whom he calls *amicus noster*. This amiability disappears in the 1524 version.<sup>60</sup> The religious and political conflicts in the 1520s had unleashed forces that began to split the responses to the Dionysian Question along confessional lines. Still, a few such as Erasmus and Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534) refused to come to heel.

Valla and Erasmus were never the only scholars interested in the Dionysian Question, but more than anyone else they were the ones who reoriented it from the Platonic preoccupations in the *scholia* on the corpus, towards new critical questions about biblical and patristic evidence, as well as historical research into anachronistic terminology and into early Christianity. And while Humanists such as Valla and Erasmus seemed to ignore the question of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*'s Platonism, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) completed a prodigious commentary on and translation of the *Mystical Theology* and *The Divine Names* that explains the Platonism in these works at length. Against

Ficino's position that Dionysius was first a Platonist and then a Christian, Catholics such as Lefèvre d'Étaples argued that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was not Platonic while Protestants such as Luther dismissed it because of its Platonizing. Erasmus did not examine the corpus's Platonism, even though Ficino brought it to light. This undeniable evidence left behind by its author remained in the text like late ancient fingerprints awaiting future analysis.

## NOTES

1. Erasmus (1516), *Novum Instrumentum*: annotation to Acts 17:34. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
2. On Luther and the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, see Rorem (2015), 'Martin Luther's Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality', 101–119.
3. Cardinal Francesco Bellarmino (1645), *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis liber unus*, 43. Translation by Mark Edwards.
4. Joseph Stiglmayr (1895), 'Der neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogen. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehr vom Uebel', 253–273; Hugo Koch (1895), 'Proklus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen', 438–454.
5. Proclus (1963), *The Elements of Theology*, xxvi–xxvii.
6. Salvatore Lilla (2005), *Dionigi l'Areopagita e il platonismo cristiano*, 159; Eduard Schwartz (1914), *Acta Concilium Oecumenicorum*, vol. 4.2: 172: 5, 173: 12–18.
7. Irénée Hausherr (1936), 'Doutes au sujet du « Divin Denys », 2: 484–490.
8. Jan Ziolkowski (2007), 'Peter Abelard as Textual Critic and Historian', 362–366.
9. PG 4: 21D–23A; Beate Regina Suchla (1980), 'Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des *Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*', 31–66; Suchla (1984) 'Die Überlieferung des Prologs des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen *Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*', 176–188; Suchla (1985) 'Eine Redaktion des griechischen *Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum* im Umkreis des Johannes von Skythopolis, des Verfassers von Prolog und Scholien: ein dritter Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des *Corpus Dionysiacum*', 177–193; Suchla (1989), 'Die Überlieferung von Prolog und Scholien des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen *Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*', 79–83; Suchla (1995), 'Verteidigung eines platonischen Denkmodells einer christlichen Welt: Die philosophische und theologiegeschichtliche Bedeutung des Scholienwerks des Johannes von Skythopolis zu den areopagitischen Traktaten', 1–28; Rorem and Lamoreaux (1998), *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*.
10. PG 4: 20C–D.
11. PG 4: 21–23D; see Suchla as well as Rorem and Lamoreaux references in n. 9 above; Pietro Podolak (2007), 'Giovanni di Scitopoli interprete del *Corpus Dionysiacum*', 335–386; Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi (2018), *Dietro 'Dionigi l'Areopagita' La genesi e gli scopi del Corpus Dionysiacum*, 89.
12. PG 3: 116 A–B
13. Hyacinthe François Dondaine (1953), *Le Corpus Dionysien de l'Université de Paris au XIIIe siècle*.
14. For the Renaissance reception of the *Corpus* see also D. P. Walker (1954), 'The Prisca Theologia in France', 204–259; John Monfasani (1987), 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

- in Mid-Quattrocento Rome', 189–219; Erick Wilberding (1991), 'A Defense of Dionysius the Areopagite by Rubens', 19–34; Ritter (1993), 'Dionysius Areopagita im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert', 143–158; Thomas Leinkauf (1997), 'Philologie, Mystik, Metaphysik', 583–609; Claudio Moreschini (1998), 'Aspetti della difesa del cristianesimo nell'attività letteraria di Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola', 261–290; Moreschini (2002), 'L'Autenticità del *Corpus Dionysianum*: contestazione e difese', 189–216; Stéphane Toussaint (1999), 'L'Influence de Ficin à Paris et le Pseudo-Denys des Humanistes', 381–414, as well as the articles in Stéphane Toussaint and Christian Trottman, eds (2014), *Le Pseudo-Denys à la Renaissance*.
15. John Monfasani, 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Mid-Quattrocento Rome'.
  16. Pope Pius II first appointed Balbi as Bishop of Nicotera then of Tropea when it became awkwardly obvious that the previous Bishop of Nicotera was still alive! Monfasani, 218–219; MS. Kues-Bernkastel, St.-Nikolaus-Hospital, Cus. 44; On Balbi see also Alessandro Pratesi (1963), 'Balbi, Pietro' *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 5, and Monfasani (2012), 'Quality Control in Renaissance Translations', 129–140. I wish to thank Monfasani for reminding me about the mix-up over Balbi's bishopric.
  17. Monfasani (1987), 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Mid-Quattrocento Rome', 193–194; Henri Dominique Saffrey (1979–1980), 'Pietro Balbi et la première traduction latine de la *Théologie Platonicienne* de Proclus', 425–437.
  18. Monfasani (1987), 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite' 205–214.
  19. Denis J.-J. Robichaud (2021), 'Cardinal Bessarion and the *Corpus Dionysiacum*'.
  20. Lorenzo Valla (1505), *In latinam novi testamenti*; Valla (1970) *Collatio Novi Testamenti*.
  21. On Valla's biblical scholarship see Valla (1970); Monfasani (1994), 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite'; Christopher Celenza (1994), 'Renaissance Humanism and the New Testament', 33–52; and Celenza (2012) 'Lorenzo Valla's Radical Philology', 365–394; and Moreschini (2002), 'L'Autenticità del *Corpus Dionysianum*'.
  22. 'aut rerum natura patitur, aut mundi machina destruetur', Valla (1505), fol. XXVv. Camporeale (1972), *Lorenzo Valla: umanesimo e teologia*, 428. This Dionysian legend was incorporated into the Roman breviary, which reads *Aut Deus naturae patitur, aut mundi machina dissolvitur*. Michael Syncellus writes 'Ο ἄγνωστος, ἔφη, σαρκὶ πάσχει Θεός, δι' ὃν τὸ πᾶν ἐξόφωται τε καὶ σεσάλευται'. There is clearly confusion in the tradition that handed this quotation down to the Roman breviary, where Valla would have encountered it. See Christopher Walter (1990), 'Three Notes on the Iconography of Dionysius the Areopagite', 255–274.
  23. Valla (1505), *In latinam* fol. XXV<sup>v</sup>; Camporeale (1972), 428–429. On Valla's arguments see also Monfasani (1994), 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite'; Moreschini (1998), 'Aspetti della difesa del cristianesimo nell'attività letteraria di Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola'; and Moreschini (2002), 'L'Autenticità del *Corpus Dionysianum*'.
  24. Valla (1970), *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, 167.
  25. *tenebras fuisse per universam terram: tenebrae factae sunt super universam terram / σκότος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν* Matthew 27: 45; *tenebrae factae sunt in universa terra / σκότος ἐγένετο ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν γῆν* Luke 23: 44
  26. See the discussion in Moreschini (2002) 'L'Autenticità del *Corpus Dionysianum*'.
  27. Salvatore Camporeale (1976), 'Lorenzo Valla tra medioevo e rinascimento', 11–194; Camporeale (2014), *Christianity, Latinity, and Culture*.
  28. Camporeale (1976), 59–60.
  29. Ludwig Baur (1941), *Cusanus Texte. III. Marginalien. I. Nicolaus Cusanus und Ps. Dionysius im Lichte der Zitate und Randbemerkungen des Cusanus*, 19; Eugene F. Rice Jr. (1972),

- The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Related Texts*, 68 n. 10; Edmond Vansteenberghe (1920), *Le cardinal Nicolas de Cues*, 1920), 26 n. 5; Jean-Pierre Massaut (1974), *Critique et Tradition A la Veille de la Réforme en France*, 180.
30. John Monfasani (1987), 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Mid-Quattrocento Rome'.
  31. Moreschini (1998), 'Aspetti', 284; Moreschini (2002), 'L'Autenticità', 194.
  32. Monfasani (1987), 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Mid-Quattrocento Rome'.
  33. Schwartz (1914), *Acta Concilium Oecumenicorum*, vol. 4.2, 172: 5, 173: 12–18; Mainoldi (2018), *Dietro 'Dionigi l'Areopagita'*, 62, 76; Rorem and Lamoreaux (1998), *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 102.
  34. LB IX, 506A; ASD IX.5 11.
  35. LB V, 29 F. ASD V.8 n. 828. I would like to thank Juliusz Domański for confirming that Erasmus did in fact write 'Dionysius quidam' in the 1503 edition of the *Enchiridion* since this first edition was not at my disposal while I finalized the draft of this chapter.
  36. Erasmus (2019), LB V, 75C–E; CWE 41: *New Testament Scholarship of Erasmus: An Introduction with Erasmus' Prefaces and Ancillary Writings*, ed. and trans. Robert D. Sider, 490–491, with the variants from 1519 and 1520.
  37. LB VI, 427–428; CWE 41, 963–964.
  38. *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament Acts—Romans—I and II Corinthians* (1990), eds Anne Reeve and M. A. Screech (Brill: Leiden).
  39. Erasmus (2008), annotation to Acts 17:34. The literature on Erasmus and biblical scholarship is vast. I will limit myself to mentioning two recent work that cites valuable studies: Erika Rummel (2008), *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* and CWE 41.
  40. LB IX, 917 B–C.
  41. Joseph Burney Trapp (1996), 'Erasmus on William Grocyn and Ps.-Dionysius', 298.
  42. Montagu Burrows (1890), 'Linacre's Catalogue of Books Belogning to William Grocyn in 1520', 321.
  43. To say nothing of the more widely available Latin copies of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, Grocyn's ownership of Greek manuscripts can be identified with MSS. Oxford, Corpus Christi College, 141 and 163. On Grocyn's library see Nigel Wilson (2011), *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts of Corpus Christi College Oxford*.
  44. MS. Oxford, Corpus Christi College, 163, ff. 4r–5r; the manuscript includes the heading ἀπὸ σχολίων τινὸς φιλοπόνου ἀνδρός. For the catalogue description: Wilson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts of Corpus Christi College Oxford* 29.
  45. MSS. Oxford, Corpus Christi College, 96, 98, 99, 117, 141, 158.
  46. CWE 61 (1992): *Patristic Scholarship, The Edition of St. Jerome*, ed. and trans. James F. Brady and John C. Olin, 71.
  47. CWE 61 (1992), 72.
  48. CWE 61 (1992), 73.
  49. CWE 61 (1992), 73.
  50. CWE 61 (1992), 74.
  51. CWE 61 (1992), 75.
  52. Erika Rummel (1989), *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics*, 179–229; Trapp (1996), 'Erasmus on William Grocyn and Ps.-Dionysius', 300–302.
  53. LB IX, 472B–C
  54. LB IX, 506A
  55. Rummel (1989), *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics*, 2: 38.
  56. *Prologus*: LB IX, 446C–D; *Supputatio*: LB IX, 675F–76B.

- 57. Rummel (1989), 2: 49–51.
- 58. LB IX, 916E–F
- 59. LB IX, 916F–917F
- 60. See especially Massaut (1974), *Critique et Tradition*, 178–229, but also Rummel (1989), *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics*, 2: 73–79.

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MS. Oxford, Corpus Christi College, 163.  
MS. Oxford, Corpus Christi College, 158.

### Abbreviations

PG 3–4: *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (1857–1866): *Corpus Dionysiacum*.  
CWE: *Collected Works of Erasmus* (1974– )  
LB: *Des. Erasmi Roterodami Opera omnia*, ed. Jean Leclerc 10 vols (Leiden: 1703–1706).  
ASD: *Opera omnia Des. Erasmi Roterodami* (Amsterdam: 1969– ).

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## CHAPTER 32

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# LUTHER ON DIONYSIUS

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JOHANNES ZACHHUBER

THE reception of Dionysius the Areopagite in Martin Luther can appear straightforward. From at least 1520, the reformer was scathing in his rejection of the late ancient writer, ‘quisquis fuerit’, as he would say echoing Erasmus.<sup>1</sup> The Areopagite’s fraudulently obtained quasi-apostolic authority lent support to ideas and practices in the Church and theology that Luther had come to regard as highly problematic. The charge sheet was wide-ranging and included Dionysius’ metaphysical justification of a hierarchical priesthood and his acceptance of multiple sacraments, but also his apparent endorsement of a mystical ascent directly to the transcendent God rather than through the incarnate and crucified Christ. Overall, Dionysius was, in Luther’s famous phrase, ‘more Platonist than Christian’.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, it will argue that the historical reality was considerably more complex than such a simple summary suggests. By the sixteenth century, the writings collected in the Dionysian Corpus had influenced generations of Eastern and Western theologians, many of whom were of the utmost importance to Luther himself as well as his early followers. Luther’s own debt to the mystical tradition, steeped in Dionysian ideas, is well known, but his early development was also affected by the Humanist movement which considered the Areopagite the supreme mediator of classical and Christian culture. At the same time, there were multiple reasons for the reformer to reject Dionysius, notably his use as an authority for the sacramental order of the late medieval Church. A further complicating factor was the Humanist debate about the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus.

The following account starts from an analysis of Luther’s sharp and polemical rebuke of Dionysius in his *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, published in the autumn of 1520. In a second step, this critique will be traced to earlier, more nuanced utterances that betray Luther’s entanglements with the Dionysian tradition. In this connection, the essay will include a discussion of the controversial topic of Luther’s relationship to mysticism more broadly.

## LUTHER'S CRITIQUE OF DIONYSIUS

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The year 1518 is often seen as a turning point in the history of Luther's conflict with the Roman Church.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the controversy initially appeared as a mere continuation of the well-worn critique of specific abuses in the late medieval Church, it now became increasingly clear that Luther's theology ultimately targeted the very foundations of Catholic ecclesiology. From his well-known rejection of the papacy in the Leipzig Debate (June/July 1519), the reformer soon advanced to a fundamental critique of the sacramental order which the Council of Constance (1414–1418) had authoritatively defined for the Western Church. In this development, his book *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (*De captivitate babylonica ecclesiae*, 1520) stands out for its unequivocal rejection of Catholic sacramentalism and the exposition of an alternative vision of a Church of the divine Word. It has therefore often been considered as one of the most momentous texts in the whole Reformation movement.<sup>4</sup>

Much of his book is taken up with a critical discussion of the seven sacraments of the medieval Church. In the section devoted to the sacrament of ordination, Luther introduces Dionysius. It is worth giving the relevant passage in full:

But, you say, 'what about Dionysius who lists six sacraments in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and names ordination as one of them?' I reply: I know that among the ancients, he is the only author that supports seven sacraments, although he leaves out marriage and thus gives us only six. Among the other fathers we read absolutely nothing about this sacrament, and whenever they speak of these things, they don't include it under the term 'sacrament'. After all 'sacraments' are a recent invention.

In fact, to be even bolder, I completely disapprove of giving so much credence to this Dionysius, whoever he was, since there is practically no solid learning to be found in him. Take, for instance, the fabrications about the angels in his *Celestial Hierarchy* (a book much sweated over by people of a curious or superstitious temperament). By what authority or reason, I ask, does he prove any of this? If you read and evaluate this honestly, are not all these things his own dreamlike musings? On the other hand, in his *Mystical Theology* (so highly praised by some of the most ignorant theologians), he is most dangerous, speaking more like a Platonist than a Christian. I would not want any faithful soul to pay the least attention to these books. They do not speak at all about Christ, so that you will lose even what you already know about him. I speak from experience. Let us instead listen to Paul, so that we learn to know Jesus Christ, 'and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2, 2). For this is the way, the life and the truth (John 14, 6). This is the ladder by which we come to the Father. For as he said, 'No one comes to the Father, except through me.' (John 14, 6)

So too in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. What does he do here but describe some church rituals, playing around with his allegories which prove nothing? [ ... ] Allegorical studies like these are for people with too much time on their hands. [ ... ] It would not be hard for me to write a better *Hierarchy* than Dionysius did, since he

knew nothing of pope, cardinals, or archbishops, and made the bishops supreme over all. [ ... ] I think it is worthless for theologians to allegorise before they have exhausted the legitimate and simple sense of Scripture. [ ... ]

We need not, therefore, hold something to be a sacrament just because Dionysius describes it thus.<sup>5</sup>

This scathing outburst against the Areopagite's authority was not Luther's first literary engagement with Dionysius. Nevertheless, it is a good starting point for the present survey as it is one of his most comprehensive and certainly his most consequential comment on the mysterious writer and his theology. For better or worse, therefore, it has largely determined posterity's perception of Luther's assessment of the Areopagite.<sup>6</sup> Thus far, the present passage deserves to be considered the *locus classicus* for Luther's explicit reckoning with the Dionysian tradition. Yet the text is also more complex than has often been appreciated. While it is regularly cited in scholarly treatments of Luther's attitude to the Areopagite, the full passage has rarely or never been subject to a detailed and full analysis.

Most importantly perhaps, scholars have tended to focus on Luther's dismissal of Dionysius' mystical theology in these lines.<sup>7</sup> For this there is some justification, as we shall see in due course. Nevertheless, such an approach is also deficient as it abstracts almost entirely from the context of Luther's present assessment of the Areopagite and from the occasion that prompted it, about which the reformer is clear: unnamed apologists of the Catholic sacramental order, he acknowledges, have cited Dionysius as a patristic authority in favour of the sacramental character of ordination.

In defence, Luther initially points out that Dionysius is the only Church Father to have held such a view. Having thus exposed the Areopagite as unrepresentative of patristic theology, the reformer quickly moves on to a more fundamental assault on his authority. He first attacks the Areopagite's speculations about angels in the *Celestial Hierarchy* as unduly speculative, then continues with the notorious claim that the Areopagite in his *Mystical Theology* is 'more Platonist than Christian', chides Dionysius' mysticism for its omission of Christ ('they speak not at all about Christ') before turning, finally, to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. In this book, writes Luther, Dionysius relies on allegory which is a supremely unreliable method of theological reasoning and can yield even the most implausible results. His conclusion is unequivocal: 'We need not, therefore, hold something to be a sacrament just because Dionysius described it thus.'<sup>8</sup>

Luther's objections to different aspects of the teaching of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in the present passage can easily seem eclectic. Considering them within the context of the *Babylonian Captivity*, however, reveals a rather coherent critique. We need to recall that Dionysius in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* had justified the sacred order of priests within the Church through their analogy with the celestial order of angels.<sup>9</sup> By ridiculing the Areopagite's arbitrary speculation about angels in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, then, Luther does not stray from his topic, but indicates that the argument in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* rests on shaky theological ground. The same can be said about his seemingly unexpected dig at allegory: whatever Luther's overall critique of this exegetical

technique,<sup>10</sup> he is here in all likelihood specifically concerned with the problem that Dionysius used this method to deduce the institutional structure of the Church from the architecture of the celestial cosmos.

Throughout the whole passage, then, Luther never loses sight of his polemical goal. Dionysius' support for the sacramental character of the ordination is criticized as allegorically derived from his angelology which, in its turn, is rejected as unduly speculative. It almost goes without saying that the charge—more implied than spelled out—that despite his auctorial pretence, Dionysius was not at all a witness of the apostolic era, perfectly fits the same pattern.

The reconstruction of this coherent kernel of Luther's case against Dionysius as an authority in support of Catholic ecclesiology in *De captivitate babylonica*, moreover, points to a specific historical background. Only months before he embarked on writing the *Babylonian Captivity*, Luther was confronted with an appeal to Dionysius' ecclesiological authority in his debate with John Eck (1486–1543), the so-called Leipzig Debate.<sup>11</sup> It would, admittedly, be facile to identify the anonymous who, according to the *Babylonian Captivity*, cited Dionysius in support of the sacramental character of ordination, with Luther's great opponent of the previous year. After all, in Leipzig the controversy centred on the origins and the character of papal power, not on the question of the Church's sacramental order.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the use Eck made of Dionysius in his case for papal primacy is the most direct evidence we possess for Luther's awareness at the time of the Areopagite's importance for the defenders of Catholic ecclesiology.

From the imperfect records that are extant of the disputation, it appears that Eck brought up Dionysius on a number of occasions. Most significantly, the Areopagite was given pride of place in Eck's formal objection to Luther's thirteenth thesis that papal primacy was only of human, not divine law.<sup>13</sup> With this objection, the debate as a whole was opened. Of course, Eck could not draw on Dionysius for the specifically Roman primacy that the Western Church had increasingly accepted since the end of late antiquity. Instead, he quoted the Areopagite to the effect that the ecclesiastical hierarchy as such was modelled on that of the angels:

Thus, our own hierarchy is blessedly and harmoniously divided into orders in accordance with divine revelation and therefore deploys the same sequence as the hierarchies of heaven.<sup>14</sup>

The key citation, then, on which Luther's Leipzig opponent of 1519 built his case, was precisely a text from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in which an ecclesiological claim was based on an allegorical interpretation of the angelic realm.

In Leipzig, Luther had to abide by the strict rules of late medieval university debates which only permitted a narrow range of responses.<sup>15</sup> He therefore merely objected that the quotation from Dionysius was irrelevant to his case.<sup>16</sup>

Later in the debate, Eck appealed to the Areopagite in support of the distinction between priests and bishops:

As testimony in this matter I adduce Dionysius, more ancient than Jerome and a bishop of the primitive church ('Hieronymo antiquiorem et primitivae ecclesiae hierarcham') who in his book *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* placed among the sacred orders the supreme hierarch who has been made bishop...<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of the specific point of doctrine at issue, this passage indicates how crucial the historicity of Dionysius' persona was for his use as a theological authority: the superiority of his authority compared with that of Jerome—one of the most revered teachers of the Latin Church—derives from his antiquity and his role as a bishop in the Church of the apostles. His writing would, if genuine, prove that the hierarchical institution prevalent in the sixteenth century could, in principle, be traced back to the primitive Church. For the Reformation debate about the nature of the Church, Dionysius was thus a supremely important point of reference. Eck was the first but certainly not the last Roman polemicist to enlist him as a prime witness to the first-century origin of the hierarchical Church.<sup>18</sup>

Concurrently with these controversies but independently of them, however, the basis of this authority was undermined.<sup>19</sup> The Humanist case against the authenticity of the Dionysian Corpus had originally been advanced by Lorenzo Valla, but became known to a larger, educated European public through a number of publications by Erasmus, notably his Greek New Testament of 1516. It is likely that Luther was aware of his argument at least from this date, but we do not know when it began to weigh on him. The Erasmian reference in the *Babylonian Captivity* to 'Dionysius whoever he may be' is the first hint we can glean that he decided to align himself with the view of the critics. It is therefore plausible that this decision was not least owed to the specific constellation reflected in this writing. Whatever Luther's assessment of the historical merits of Valla's and Erasmus' cases, he must have been strongly motivated to accept their argument simply because it undermined his opponents' appeal to Dionysius as an early witness to doctrines and practices of the Church, such as the sacramental character of the ordination, whose theological validity Luther increasingly sought to challenge.<sup>20</sup>

The historical verdict against Dionysius' authenticity, moreover, implied a moral judgement about the author which, once again, cannot have been unwelcome to the reformer. It is arguable that this judgement is connoted in Luther's *quisquis fuerit*: the writer is a somebody, an unknown individual who probably had reasons to hide behind the venerated persona. He is certainly not a Father to whom respect and authority are owed. Thus far, his opponents' case fails regardless of the inherent plausibility or implausibility of the Areopagite's ecclesiology, simply due to their reliance on a source of dubious origin.

In sum, a close reading of Luther's critique of Dionysius in the *Babylonian Captivity* reveals a rather coherent agenda despite the text's polemical cast. As we have seen, the reformer had set himself the task to counter the argument that ordination ought to be regarded as a sacrament on the authority of the Areopagite. This claim, he retorted, was unreasonable as Dionysius' ecclesiology was: (1) an outlier from the patristic tradition; and (2) derived from highly speculative angelology on the basis of (3) allegorical interpretation. Finally, (4) the author probably was no Father at all but an unknown forger.



This argument may or may not be considered convincing. What seems clear, however, is that it did not depend on Luther's concurrent assault on the legitimacy of Dionysius' mysticism as overly Platonic and insufficiently christocentric. Contrary to the impression created by many blanket references to this text in the literature, therefore, Luther's rejection of the Areopagite as a Church Father in the *Babylonian Captivity* should not be rashly compounded with the protracted problem of the reformer's relation to the mystical tradition. In many ways, Luther's concern to delegitimize his opponents' ecclesiological use of the seemingly unassailable authority of the Areopagite is sufficient to explain his outburst in the present place.

At the same time, however, it is nevertheless remarkable that Luther did introduce the topic of Dionysius' mysticism in a context where it was strictly speaking irrelevant to his immediate purpose. This observation has to be explained, but such an elucidation requires a fuller account of Luther's interaction with Dionysian mysticism.

## LUTHER AND DIONYSIAN MYSTICISM

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In what follows, an overview of Luther's major references to Dionysius will be provided beginning with his earliest known writings. Luther's references to Dionysius are mostly from his early period occurring in the context of his strictly academic work. In Luther's later texts, the Areopagite is only rarely mentioned. It is nevertheless not clear that Luther ever fundamentally changed his view of Dionysius' mystical theology.

### The Early Luther (1513–1518)

Luther evidently knew the Dionysian writings early in his career, and he knew them extremely well.<sup>21</sup> Given the considerable corpus of texts we possess even from the early period of Luther's literary activity, however, the overall number of references to Dionysius must be called modest; the Areopagite certainly does not emerge as a major conversation partner of the future reformer. Taken together, his early lectures on the Psalms, on Romans, and on Hebrews yield not much more than a handful of relevant passages. These texts do, however, indicate a specific interest the young Luther took in the Dionysian tradition and point to its significance for some fundamental aspects of his nascent theology.

After Luther's appointment as professor of theology at Wittenberg (1512), his first lecture course was dedicated to the exegesis of the Psalms. The scholia extant from these lectures, delivered between 1513 and 1515, are known as *Dictata super Psalterium*. Dionysius is mentioned and discussed in two places.

One of these arises from Luther's exploration of a doctrine that was to become of absolute centrality to his mature theology: the hiddenness of God. Explaining Ps. 18, 11 (17, 12 Vulgate: 'He made darkness his hiding place'), Luther distinguishes no less than five

ways in which this verse can be understood. Among them, one is explicitly credited to 'the blessed Dionysius':

Second, because he dwells in an unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6, 16), so that no mind can penetrate to him, unless he has given up his own light and has been lifted up higher. Therefore, blessed Dionysius teaches that one must enter into analogical darkness and ascend by way of denials. For thus God is hidden and beyond understanding.<sup>22</sup>

There is no indication here that Luther would not accept this interpretation as genuine; the reference to 1 Timothy, moreover, shows that he saw support for it not only in the Psalms but also in the Pauline corpus. Yet from the perspective of Luther's later writings, it is notable that immediately after the present quotation, he adds the following interpretation of the same biblical verse:

For he is concealed in humanity, which is his darkness. Here he could not be seen but only heard.<sup>23</sup>

Luther then is clearly aware at this point that the Dionysian imperative of ascending to the mystical darkness of a transcendent God was different from the Christological task of perceiving the Godhead 'veiled in flesh'. The former is also already associated with vision, the latter with preaching and the Word. Evidently, these will all be cornerstones of Luther's mature reformation theology.

In a second passage, Luther's appreciation for Dionysius is, if anything, more strongly expressed. On the occasion of Ps. 64, 2 (Vulgate<sup>24</sup>), Luther explains the meaning of 'silence' and includes the following, brief exposition of the Areopagite's negative theology:

Secondly [silence can be understood] according to the ecstatic and negative theology in which God is praised in silence, unspeakably, and through wonder and admiration of his majesty. In this way, not only is every word deemed too little, but also every thought inferior, to his praise. This is the true Kabbalah which is extremely rare. Thus, while the affirmative way [of speaking] about God is imperfect in thought as well as speech, the negative way is the most perfect. Therefore, the word 'hyper' is often used in Dionysius, because above all thought it is necessary simply to enter into darkness. However, the word [silence, as used] in this Psalm should not, I think, be understood on this interpretation. [Hence our theologians are too timid, even though they bravely discuss divine things and pronounce on them. Yet, as I said, their affirmative theology is to the negative as milk is in relation to wine. And this cannot be treated in disputations and through the use of many words but in the highest repose of the mind and in silence that is, in rapture and ecstasy. And this makes the true theologian. But such a one is not crowned by any university but only by the Holy Spirit. And he who sees it [sc. negative theology], sees that the whole affirmative theology does not know anything.<sup>25</sup>

Luther does not here endorse an apophatic interpretation of the verse he is exegeting ('Attamen literam huius psalmi non puto de hac anagogia loqui'); all the more relevant is the brief excursus he appends on the overall virtues of the 'most perfect' negative theology which, he argues, relates to 'affirmative' theology as milk does to wine! By his frequent use of the prefix 'hyper', we read, Dionysius indicates the existence of a darkness beyond all rationality; to enter into this darkness, in silence, rapture, and ecstasy is the task of true theology.

The theme of an apophatic encounter with God in his darkness is thus recurrent, but here Luther much more clearly extolls the virtues of the Areopagite's negative theology. Heiko Oberman was undoubtedly right to caution that references to a traditional authority in a late medieval thinker do not necessarily imply the full acceptance of this authority's overall system of thought.<sup>26</sup> Yet it is hard not to find in the present text a fairly straightforward endorsement of negative theology at least in its contrast with the 'scholastic' theology of the universities. Against their dead letter, Dionysius offers a true encounter with God based on the recognition that this can only occur once the limits of speech and thought are radically accepted.

Of particular interest, arguably, is Luther's reference to the 'true Kabbalah'. The project of a Christian Kabbalah was connected with the Italian Humanist Pico della Mirandola and his German student Johannes Reuchlin, the major scholar of Hebrew of his age.<sup>27</sup> To both, Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* represented the apex of a much broader intellectual and religious tradition that included also the deepest insights of pagan and Jewish wisdom. As his reference indicates, Luther is familiar with this background. He knew Reuchlin's work well and, probably, also the Platonist commentaries on Dionysius written by Marsilio Ficino.<sup>28</sup>

We have seen that a few years later, in the *Babylonian Captivity*, the reformer objected to Dionysius' Platonic outlook. To modern readers for whom the Areopagite is, for better or worse, the most uncontroversial case of an ancient Christian Platonist, this characterization comes as no surprise. The same was not necessarily the case, however, in the early sixteenth century when the notion of a Platonic Dionysius was closely associated with the Renaissance Platonism of the Florentine Academy.<sup>29</sup> Luther's entirely affirmative reference to the 'true Kabbalah' as tantamount to the apophatic praise of God in unspeakable silence thus adds important context also to his later criticism. Luther's Dionysius, we may surmise, was not the scholastic Dionysius of, say, Thomas Aquinas; it was not either the Dionysius of the medieval mystical tradition—although Luther owed much to some of these authors as well. Instead, it seems, Luther's early contact with and fascination for the Areopagite was mediated through his reception among Humanist authors who, like the future reformer himself, drew on him as part of their search for an alternative to the scholastic tradition.

In his celebrated early lecture course on the Epistle to the Romans (1515), the future reformer sounds a first warning against an attempt to rely on the mystical ascent at the expense of faith in Christ. He criticises those:

[ ... ] who seek to enter into the inner darkness [of God] according to the mystical theology ('secundum mysticam theologiam'), ignoring the images of Christ's passion, want to hear and see the uncreated word itself rather than being first justified and purified in the eyes of their heart through the incarnate word.<sup>30</sup>

As in the first passage from the *Dictata*, there is a recognition here that mystical theology is not or not explicitly Christological; yet while in his earlier lectures Luther merely enumerated the different approaches, the present passage indicates that they may be in conflict. Luther might then seem to move towards a more critical stance even at this point. Two caveats, however, are in order. First, the warning expressed in these words is not particularly original to Luther. Earlier medieval thinkers, such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1143) and Bonaventure (1221–1274), whose works Luther knew well, expressed themselves in the same way and sometimes in strikingly similar words.<sup>31</sup> Second, Luther does not here mention Dionysius by name. Of course, the Areopagite was uniquely associated with 'mystical theology', and it is therefore eminently plausible that Luther had him in mind when using this expression, but the generic reference is a further indication of the difficulty inherent in any attempt to separate Luther's view of Dionysius from his attitude to a large part of the theological and spiritual tradition he inherited.

Luther must have known of Erasmus' doubts regarding the identity of the Areopagite at least since 1516. Yet there is initially little evidence that this changed the reformer's assessment of Dionysius. His Lectures on Hebrews, delivered in 1517/18 and thus at the height of the indulgences controversy, contain references to Dionysius largely in line with those of the *Dictata*. Luther here is still allowing the mystical ascent to God as one legitimate approach to the divine.<sup>32</sup>

From this survey, a fairly clear picture emerges. First of all, Luther evidently had an early interest in Dionysius, but this was exclusively focused on the *Mystical Theology*. Significantly, there is no trace of any concern for the Dionysius of the *Hierarchies*.

Second, Luther's view of the Areopagite as a mystical writer is affirmative insofar as he considers Dionysius a fellow-traveller in his evolving opposition to 'scholasticism'. There are indications that he reads the Areopagite through the more recent, Humanist commentaries on the *Mystical Theology* and thus as part of an attempt to replace the stale, 'Aristotelian' speculation about God with a more experiential theology that does justice both to God's supreme transcendence (his 'divine darkness') and to the fullness of human existence. This sympathy cannot easily be written off as a merely youthful exploration on the way to the reformer's mature theology. It is surely significant that the phrase *deus absconditus*, so central for Luther's later thought, is first introduced in connection with a reference to the Areopagite.<sup>33</sup>

Third, Luther also saw, however, that this non-scholastic approach to God allowed for (at least) two variations: it could aim straight for the eternal, transcendent God and his Word, or it could seek to encounter him in the lowliness of the Incarnate and, especially in his suffering and death. In his early texts, it seems, Luther was mostly willing to see these two as complementary although he echoes the traditional concern that a purely mystical approach dangerously neglects the crucified Christ. As is well known, some

of his later utterances on this topic starkly emphasized their incompatibility. It is therefore possible to see the later critique of Dionysian mysticism prefigured even in Luther's earliest references to his thought.

## Luther's Second Psalms Lectures (1519–1521)

It is usually assumed that Luther's second series of Lectures on the Psalms (*Operationes in Psalmos*), delivered between 1519 and 1521, shows his growing awareness of the tension between the 'Dionysian' approach to God and his own theology of the cross.<sup>34</sup> Such a development should be expected given that these lectures coincided with Luther's escalating critique of Dionysius as described in the first section of this essay. Yet even here, careful attention to his words reveals a more nuanced picture. In the most frequently cited passage from the *Operationes*, Luther criticizes an interpretation of the Song of Songs that applies the pleasures of erotic love directly to the relationship between God and the believer on the grounds that such a reading fails to take seriously the reference to death in the biblical text (Cant. 8, 6: 'fortis ut mors dilectio'). In this connection, he includes a warning against certain 'Italian and German commentaries on Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*:

No one should believe himself to be a mystical theologian if he read, understood and taught those, or rather: if he made himself appear to understand and teach them. For you become a theologian by living, dying and being damned, not by understanding, reading and speculating.<sup>35</sup>

Note that Luther here is careful not to object to either Dionysius or to negative or mystical theology as such. In fact, he scolds these unnamed commentators for teaching 'the opposite of negative theology'<sup>36</sup> because 'they love neither death nor hell'.<sup>37</sup> For this reason, reading their books does not make anyone a 'mystical theologian'. What then makes a mystical theologian? It is remarkable that the contrast Luther draws in the present passage, between a speculative theology on the one hand and an existential one on the other, echoes a comment from his slightly earlier *Lectures on Hebrews* in which Dionysius' mystical theology itself was precisely aligned with the theology of experience as opposed to scholastic speculation.<sup>38</sup>

Luther is therefore perhaps best understood as advancing a dialectical critique of the Dionysian tradition combining acceptance of the principal validity of his project with the rejection of certain attempts to accomplish it.<sup>39</sup> There is a legitimate 'negative theology', and the aim to be a 'mystical theologian' remains important: God is truly 'hidden' and exists 'in darkness'; he therefore can only be approached by one willing to recognize the radical constraints placed on any human endeavour to encounter him. Once these constraints are taken seriously, moreover, the largely rational theology of 'scholasticism' becomes an impossibility and gives way to an alternative discourse intimately interwoven with human existence in its entirety.

As much as he retains these ideals of the Dionysian tradition, however, Luther is increasingly vocal about the risks emanating from wrong-headed approaches to them. The Dionysian tradition is not immune to the danger inherent in *any* human attempt to connect with God; in fact, its emphatic 'negativity' can be particularly dangerous as it produces the deceptive certainty that a path to God is opening up when in reality one form of affirmation has merely replaced another. If we take Luther by his word, he would have encountered evidence for this kind of problem in recent commentaries on the *Mystical Theology*. Luther does not tell us who these commentators are. We have already seen that he was probably familiar with the work of the Florentine Platonists, such as Ficino, but what German writer does he have in mind?

An intriguing possibility is that the German commentator against whose work Luther specifically warns his audience, may have been none other than Luther's Leipzig opponent, John Eck. Eck had worked on a commentary of the *Mystical Theology* prior to his engagement with Luther's theology, but due to problems with his publisher, the book only appeared weeks before the Disputation, in May 1519.<sup>40</sup> Luther may well have read it in preparation for his public spat with his rival or in the immediate aftermath of their debate. It is arguable that this must have been sobering reading for the reformer who would have found in a book by his bitter foe ideas and arguments that were rather close to his own earlier appropriation of the Dionysian tradition: the emphasis on negative as opposed to affirmative theology; the language of divine hiddenness and darkness; the use of the mystical tradition to counter the intellectualism of the scholasticism; the emphasis on union with God beyond intellect and reason. Eck's commentary firmly stands in the tradition of Humanist enthusiasm for the Areopagite; Luther's enemy even takes up the alleged link between Dionysius and the Kabb.<sup>41</sup> All these parallels must have brought home to Luther the realization that it was perfectly possible to pursue the mystical option without coming even close to what he by then considered the only viable path to God.

It is notable that the two main complaints Luther lodges against the unnamed mystical writers in his *Operationes* correspond quite clearly to specific passages in Eck's commentary. According to Luther, the commentators on the *Mystical Theology* 'exert themselves talking idly about mystical, negative, proper, and symbolic theology not knowing what they talk about nor what they affirm.'<sup>42</sup> Eck had indeed opened his *Commentary* with a section explaining the distinctions between four types of theology: 'Theology is four-fold namely, affirmative or common; symbolic; affective, and mystical. The three former [types] are mostly affirmative, whereas the last one is negative.'<sup>43</sup> While their lists are not exactly identical, it seems evident that Luther had in mind precisely the kind of distinction proposed by Eck.

As for the use of the Song of Songs in support of a union with God that avoids 'death and hell', Eck does precisely this in his commentary on *Mystical Theology* 1. Commenting on the superiority of love over cognition and mentioning particularly the love of Christ, Eck draws wide-ranging parallels to the Song of Songs, 'a book as a whole full of mystical theology under deeply veiled images'. He continues with a lengthy enumeration of the erotic images used in the biblical book and concludes: 'What then do these and other

things remembered in that book signify if not the manifold spiritual pleasures [ ... ] which the mind experiences when it is initiated into ecstatic love.<sup>44</sup>

In a table talk in 1532, Luther named Eck in connection with a problematical theological dependence on Plato's dialectic of being and non-being:

These theologians have said that the affirmative definition is incomplete while the negative is absolute. Nobody could understand that. It must, rather, be said and understood like this: God is incomprehensible and invisible, and whatever is comprehended and seen is not God [ ... but he is] visible through his word and work. [ ... ] Those [sc. theologians] want to know God through speculations and 'have left the Word to one side.'<sup>45</sup> But I advise that 'speculation should be avoided and hope that this rule should be kept beyond my lifetime.'<sup>46</sup>

These comments must refer to Eck's *Commentary on the Mystical Theology* which was his only foray into a theological area that otherwise was rather alien to him.<sup>47</sup> Luther then knew this work at the latest by the early 1530s and at that point saw fit to single it out as evidence of the speculative, Platonic, and non-Christocentric bend of Dionysian mysticism. It is, however, eminently probable that Luther had read Eck's book about a decade earlier when his engagement with this opponent was at its height.

While the identification of Eck as the 'German commentator' on Dionysius criticized in Luther's *Operationes* must ultimately remain hypothetical, it would explain rather neatly the increased level of irritation that characterizes Luther's references to the Dionysian tradition from 1519 onwards. In particular, it sheds interesting light on the sweeping and unqualified rejection of the *Mystical Theology* in the *Babylonian Captivity*. As we have seen, Luther arguably had Eck in his sights while objecting to the use of the Areopagite in support of the sacramental character of ordination; his reference to the 'Platonic' mysticism of the Dionysian tradition, by contrast, had initially seemed rather out of place in that context. If Luther had, however, recently read Eck's commentary, it would only be natural for him to associate this theologian's use of the *Hierarchies* in the Leipzig Debate with his contemporaneous endorsement of a Humanist appropriation of the *Mystical Theology*.

Yet if Luther's increasing alarm regarding the dangerous consequences of Dionysius' mystical theology can thus be at least partly explained by their endorsement through someone like John Eck, this only makes all the more remarkable the nuanced assessment of the Areopagite himself in the *Operationes*. If the *Babylonian Captivity* demonstrates that Luther could lump Dionysius together with his opponents, his concurrently delivered lectures show that in his calmer moments he was perfectly aware that this was an over-simplification.

It is therefore significant that this nuanced critique seems to have remained Luther's considered view. It is still detectable, albeit once again wrapped with unmitigated polemic, in Luther's first Disputation against the Antinomians (1537). There he warns of the danger resulting from the attempt to 'explore the naked divinity through human rationality without the mediation of Christ' and names Dionysius explicitly as one author associated with this particular trap:



To these speculations about the naked majesty of God have given rise Dionysius with his *Mystical Theology* and others who followed him. They have written many things about spiritual nuptials where they made God himself the bridegroom and the soul the bride. They also teach that human beings in this mortal and corrupt flesh can communicate and deal with the inscrutable and eternal majesty of God without a mediator.<sup>48</sup>

The passage continues with a 'warning' against the Areopagite not dissimilar from the one Luther uttered in the *Babylonian Captivity* ('Admoneo vos, ut istam Dionysii mysticam theologiam, et similes libros, in quibus tales nugae continentur, detestemini tamquam pestem aliquam'<sup>49</sup>). For this, there is again a political reason, in this case the alleged link between Dionysian mysticism and the radical 'enthusiasm' of Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525) and the Anabaptists.<sup>50</sup>

Below this polemical level, however, Luther's argument is surprisingly close to that of the *Operationes in Psalmos* written more than fifteen years earlier. At first glance, one might, admittedly, think that Luther's position has hardened over time progressing from a criticism of unnamed *interpreters* of the *Mystical Theology* to a rejection of the Areopagitic writing itself. Luther's precise wording, however, indicates his continuing awareness that the problem was less the Dionysian text than its potential for a specific kind of interpretation. Intriguingly, the Luther of 1537 still locates the critical error in an alignment of the erotic terminology of the *Mystical Theology* with the bridal language of the Song of Songs. The Areopagite is at fault only insofar as his texts gave rise ('dederunt occasionem') to such speculations.

It appears likely, then, that Luther never fundamentally changed his early assessment of Dionysius' mystical theology. Even in his more polemical comments, he mostly distinguished between the Dionysian text itself and its potentially misleading interpretations. His most venomous attacks are directed against the latter while the Areopagite is only blamed insofar as his writings are ambiguous and liable to be misunderstood.

This does not turn Luther into a thoroughbred disciple of the Areopagite. His dependence on Dionysius was and remained limited. It can be condensed into two insights expressed through the terms 'negative theology' and 'mystical theology' in Luther's second Psalms Lectures. Both remain valid and indeed crucial, but neither of them is without ambiguity. Negative theology rightly insists on God's hiddenness or darkness critiquing any human attempt at conceptualizing the divine. It was therefore an antidote against what Luther and many contemporaries perceived as arid scholasticism, and the reformer was happy to join forces with Humanists and spiritualists in this struggle. Yet the dangers of an inappropriate approach to God were not limited to the thought of the schoolmen but could, ironically, have their worst effects within the Dionysian tradition, and in this regard the reformer became the implacable foe of its standard bearers.

Mystical theology remained significant in its insistence that human knowledge of God cannot be a matter of the intellect only. Theology involves the whole gamut of human experience; it is 'experimental';<sup>51</sup> and cannot succeed without constant awareness

that one's own destiny is at stake—in this regard, there is no strict division between the 'rapture' and 'ecstasy' of which the young Luther spoke and his later insistence on tribulation (*Anfechtung*), death, and hell. Nevertheless, there is a reason why the earlier formulations disappear: they are open to the same misunderstanding to which Areopagitic negative theology could give rise, namely, a theology of glory which, in its certainty of accomplishing real union with the transcendent God ultimately fails the task it set itself.

Thus far, Luther's unqualified dismissal of Dionysius' mystical theology in the *Babylonian Captivity* is an outlier at least in the sense that it seems to suggest that Luther considered Dionysian mysticism altogether alien to his own theology. The mature Luther admittedly saw in Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* a dangerous book against whose reading he warned and whose consequences he could describe in dramatic language:

These are satanic delusions who thus tickles the sensuality of human beings (*sensus hominum*) that they turn such lies into the most reliable truth and supreme wisdom believing they have had a certain taste of the life and the bliss of the future.<sup>52</sup>

These words from the First Disputation against the Antinomians reiterate a sentiment first expressed in the *Babylonian Captivity*. Dionysius' text diverts attention away from Christ; he is thus emphatically *not* the disciple of Paul who preached the crucified Christ. His teaching, therefore, gave rise both to the advocates of the Roman system, such as John Eck, and the radical 'enthusiasts,' such as Müntzer and the antinomians.

Yet at the danger of insisting on an overly subtle distinction, this *dangerous* character of the *Mystical Theology* is not tantamount to the complete rejection of its theological significance.<sup>53</sup> In fact, as we have seen, Luther repeatedly expressed himself in a way suggesting precisely such a distinction. This was the upshot of his remarkably specific critique of Dionysius' commentators in the *Operationes*; it was also implied in the rather oblique link he established between the *Mystical Theology* and human speculations about the 'naked divinity' in his 1537 disputation. Experience made him realize that the insistence on God's hiddenness and on an existential approach to theology were not, in themselves, enough to guarantee an evangelical theology. In fact, Luther increasingly came to think that the only salutary attitude was to focus on God's word as revealed in Jesus Christ. Yet he remained conscious, it seems, that the principles of mystical theology were not irreconcilable with the gospel even though they could and often were conducive to its falsification. Could they also be employed for better ends?

## LUTHER AND MYSTICISM

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Scholars have known for a long time that Luther's theological appreciation of mystical theology did not simply come to an end with his outburst against Dionysius in the *Babylonian Captivity*. The question of the overall relationship of Luther's theology to the

mystical tradition has therefore vexed generations of scholars; David Steinmetz called it 'not a subject for the timid and faint-hearted'.<sup>54</sup> The most influential attempt to explain the complex textual evidence has done so by way of a typological distinction between Dionysian, Latin, and German mysticism. According to this theory, which was initially championed by Erich Vogelsang but later adopted by Heiko Oberman among others,<sup>55</sup> Luther's attitude towards Dionysian mysticism was almost entirely negative, whereas his views of Latin and, particularly, German mysticism were considerably more affirmative.

While Vogelsang rightly observed that Luther's displayed different attitudes to different writers associated for us with the mystical tradition,<sup>56</sup> his proposed typology is deeply questionable even apart from its evident link with this scholar's racial ideology.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, Luther was clearly aware that Dionysian ideas were present in later authors. He referred to Italian and German commentators on the Dionysian Corpus. More importantly perhaps, he specifically mentioned bridal mysticism, especially popular among medieval 'Latin' mystical writers, as one of the most problematic interpretations of the *Mystical Theology*. In none of these texts, however, did Luther introduce the kind of distinction Vogelsang postulated, however vaguely, let alone their alleged hierarchy of theological value.

A more promising explanation, therefore, would have to start with the fundamental ambiguity Luther evidently discerned in Dionysian mysticism itself. His strongest condemnations issue from the recognition that these ideas *could* lead to conclusions that Luther considered unacceptable. In at least some cases, these dangers were connected for the reformer with individuals who were personally opposed to himself and his movement, whether on the side of the Roman Church or as part of the radical wing of the Reformation. Yet his apparent willingness to distinguish between the legitimate foundations of Areopagitic mysticism and its negative consequences also raises the possibility that more acceptable developments could have issued from the Dionysian principles of divine negativity and the mystical approach.

It is not farfetched, then, to find in Luther's affirmative comments on Bernard and Tauler evidence for a form of mysticism more compatible with the reformer's theology. As Vogelsang rightly pointed out, Luther continued to value these theologians throughout his career.<sup>58</sup> What is more, this more positive evaluation was closely tied to the specific direction into which these thinkers developed the mystical tradition. Bernard, according to Luther, gave mysticism a particularly Christological bend:

Bernard very much loves the Incarnation of Christ; and so does Bonaventure. I very much praise these two because of this article.<sup>59</sup>

Tauler, in addition, reflected on the psychological state of the mystic in a way that came close to Luther's own experience of spiritual trials.<sup>60</sup>

Vogelsang, then, was not wrong to perceive that these authors were closer to Luther's heart than other mystical writers including the Areopagite himself. Yet there is no indication that Luther saw in them a 'type' of mysticism that was altogether disconnected from its Dionysian roots. Such a perception on Luther's part would also have been

fallacious and ahistorical. A closer comparison, which is beyond the scope of the present text, would show that passages in which Luther endorses Bernard's or Tauler's mysticism often have close parallels in early texts in which the reformer referred those same ideas to Dionysian insights. This confirms what would seem *a priori* likely: that Luther was fully aware that *all* these authors drew on the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and depended on it as their ultimate source.

While a full study of Luther's use of mystical authors is beyond the purview of the present investigation, the conclusion therefore appears plausible that Luther understood this tradition as in its entirety flowing from the Areopagite's writings. As such, it was deeply ambiguous and could lead to the problematical results Luther had before his eyes in Catholic Humanists, such as Eck, and in 'enthusiasts' such as Thomas Müntzer (accepting for the sake of the argument that the latter had indeed used the *Mystical Theology*). Yet the same tradition was also capable of more promising developments, and Luther remained willing to recognize those in authors such as Bernard, Tauler, and, at least *potentially*, in Dionysius himself.

Its tenets, according to Luther, consisted in the twin-insight of God's radical otherness compared to created reality and the accompanying need to move beyond a purely intellectual approach towards an existential and experiential approach in theology. Both remained central for the reformer's thought throughout his career.

Did Luther then change his position at all? Based on the present examination of relevant texts, this question must be approached as follows. Luther, it seems, was initially attracted to the mystical Dionysius who had recently been appropriated by Humanists and other reform-minded thinkers in support of a Christian, Kabbalistic Platonism, against the Aristotelianism of the schools. Luther's affirmation of this cause was never unqualified, but it is significant that it gave way, around 1520, to a more fundamental rejection of the Areopagite precisely insofar as he was a 'Platonist'. While one should, arguably, avoid overly personalized explanations for this kind of intellectual development, it does not appear farfetched to see here a connection with Luther's concurrent entanglement with John Eck who embodied a use of Dionysius that was, for obvious reasons, uniquely problematic from the reformer's viewpoint. Luther's explicit responses to the Areopagite are thus, in many ways, part of his complex relationship with the Humanist movement and need therefore to be analyzed in this context.<sup>61</sup>

## NOTES

1. M. Luther, *De captivitate babylonica ecclesiae*, WA 6, 562, 4. Cf. WA 5, 503, 9–10 and Froehlich 1987: 41–42. Cf. also Van Rhijn 1952/3.
2. WA 6, 562, 9–10.
3. See Janz 2019: 5–14.
4. Janz 2019: 1–2.
5. WA 6, 561, 34–562, 28; ET: Janz, 223–227.
6. Cf. e.g. Rorem 1997: 291; Malysz 2008: 680.
7. In addition to the articles cited in the preceding note, cf. Froehlich 1987: 42–43.

8. WA 6, 562, 27–28.
9. Cf. esp. Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* VI Θεωρία 5 (119, 12–15 Suchla).
10. See e.g. Reinke 1973.
11. On the Leipzig Disputation see now Mattox 2019.
12. Schubert 2008: 411.
13. Schubert 2008: 427.
14. WA 59, 435, 82–4 = Dionysius, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* VI 5, p. 247 Luibheid.
15. Schubert 2008: 417–418; 427.
16. WA 59, 438, 162–164.
17. WA 59, 444, 363–368.
18. Cf. Oberman 1986: 54 with n. 25.
19. For what follows cf. Froehlich 1987: 37–39.
20. Froehlich 1987: 41.
21. Alfsvåg 2011: 102.
22. WA 3, 124, 30–33; ET: 10, 119–120.
23. WA 3, 124, 33–35; ET: loc. cit.
24. In Jerome's version 'iuxta Hebraica', the verse reads 'Tibi silens laus deus in Sion.'
25. WA 3, 372, 13–27.
26. Oberman 1986: 50–51.
27. Cf. Scholem 1954.
28. Froehlich 1987: 42.
29. Froehlich 1987: 35–36.
30. WA 56, 299–300.
31. Cf. Vogelsang 1937: 34–35.
32. Alfsvåg 2011: 104.
33. For the most sustained discussion of this point cf. Malysz 2008: 681–685.
34. Froehlich 1987: 40; Alfsvåg 2011: 106–107.
35. WA 5, 163, 27–29.
36. WA 5, 163, 22.
37. WA 5, 163, 22–23.
38. WA 57III, 179, 9–11.
39. Cf. Alfsvåg 2011: 107–108.
40. Wiedemann 1865: 496–497. Cf. Epiney-Burgard 1972.
41. Eck 1519, A4r–v. While this passage in the prologue rather emphasizes the distance between non-Christian mysteries and the mystical theology, later references are much more affirmative: Cf. Epiney-Burgard 1972: 13.
42. WA 5, 163, 17–19.
43. Eck 1519: A3v.
44. Eck 1519: B6v.
45. ° in German.
46. ° in German. WAT 1, no. 257. Cf. Alfsvåg 2011: 109–10 who rightly cautions about the use of the table talks. Yet the reference to Eck in this context seems significant enough.
47. Wiedemann 1865: 496–497; Oberman 1986: 53, n. 24.
48. WA 39/1, 389, 18–390, 1.
49. WA 39/1, 390, 3–5.
50. WA 39/1, 390, 11.
51. Cf. WA 57III, 179, 11.

52. WA 39/1, 390, 7–10.
53. Thus far, I entirely agree with Oberman 1986: 62–64.
54. Quoted from Rittgers 2019: 34. Cf. also Hamm/Leppin 2007, esp. the chapters by Leppin, Grosse, and Hamm; Leppin 2014.
55. Vogelsang 1937; Oberman 1986: 49–50.
56. On Luther's unique appreciation for John Tauler, cf. Moeller 1963 and Oberman 1986: 64.
57. For this problem, see Leppin 2005. Cf. Also Wiberg Pedersen 2015.
58. Vogelsang 1937: 38–43.
59. WA 43, 581, 11.
60. See n. 56 above.
61. Cf. Spitz 1996.

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## CHAPTER 33

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# DIONYSIUS AND THE LUTHERAN TRADITION

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JOHANNES ZACHHUBER

THIS essay gives an overview of the largely untold story of Dionysius' reception in Lutheran theology after the Reformation. Luther's attitude to Dionysius remained ambiguous throughout his life as is shown in a previous essay within this Handbook (see 'Luther on Dionysius', also by the present author). His most unqualified hostilities towards the pseudonymous writer occurred in the context of his rejection of the hierarchical claims that were made in Dionysius' name by the Roman Church. At the same time, the reformer drew on the Areopagite for some of his most fundamental ideas, notably the emphasis on the 'hidden God' and the need of an experiential approach to faith and theology. An analogous complexity can be observed in the tradition that followed him. The Lutheran divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries drew heavily on John of Damascus and could thus not avoid the heritage of Dionysius even if they expressed strong misgivings towards his authority. Their pietist opponents, on the other hand, hearkened back to the mystics of the Middle Ages and thus, as their critics were quick to point out, ultimately to the Areopagite himself.

Dionysius thus remained part of Lutheran theology through the centuries. Nevertheless, explicit endorsements of his authority were rare, as Protestant thinkers generally followed Erasmus and Luther in their rejection of the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus. The early modern debate about the identity of 'Dionysius' was largely predicated on the principle that a later author who falsely pretended to have been a contemporary of the apostles in order to advance the weight of his theological authority, had forfeited the right to be accepted as a spiritual and moral guide. The acceptance of Dionysius' authority as a theologian therefore went hand in hand with the attempted defence of his assumed persona, whereas an embrace of the historical case against his authenticity eroded the willingness to see in him a credible Father of the Church.

For obvious reasons, the purpose of the present account cannot be to discuss all relevant authors or intellectual movements from the past half millennium. Instead, the aim will be to show how Luther's ambiguous position played out in the subsequent

theological tradition with a focus on the early modern period during which, as we shall see, the Areopagite was an important but controversial point of reference. In the main sections of this essay, it briefly discusses the testimony of five very different thinkers who all wrote in the seventeenth century: Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), Georg Calixtus (1586–1656); Johann Arndt (1555–1621); Philipp Spener (1635–1705); and Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714). Each of them, as we shall see, takes a somewhat different approach to the Areopagite. Together, therefore, they demonstrate the variety of Lutheran responses to the Dionysian writings during this period but also their common root in the complex position we have encountered in the reformer himself. In a final section, the essay provides a much more succinct overview of evaluations of Dionysius, his thought, and influence in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lutheran theology.

## JOHANN GERHARD

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Gerhard, who throughout his career held a chair in theology at the University of Jena, is usually considered the most important representative of the Melancthonian scholasticism that dominated Lutheran universities from the mid-sixteenth to the early eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This fame largely rests on his magisterial nine-volume *Loci Dogmatici*, but more relevant for his assessment of Dionysius is his comprehensive *Confessio Catholica*, a justification of Lutheran theology on the basis of generally accepted authorities.

The mere existence of the *Confessio Catholica* testifies to the major role that appeal to tradition and, in particular, the argument from patristic evidence played in post-Reformation debates.<sup>2</sup> Already the Formula of Concord, issued in 1580 to end decades of bitter doctrinal disputes within the Lutheran community, contained extensive references to patristic authorities, and in subsequent decades these attempts continued to gather pace. Gerhard's *Confessio Catholica*, published between 1634 and 1638, marks the high-water mark of these attempts, but it also testifies to their bitterly contested character.<sup>3</sup>

Gerhard dealt with Dionysius in a long chapter<sup>4</sup> intended to prove the following thesis: that the Fathers are witnesses to the truth of the gospel whose writings are therefore always owed respect, but are, as human authorities, nevertheless fallible and must therefore only be accepted where they agree with Scripture.<sup>5</sup> As part of his argument, Gerhard included a lengthy section on the problem of patristic dubia and spuria.<sup>6</sup> There was, he pointed out, no principal disagreement between the confessions on this matter. Major Catholic scholars had, in fact, been keen to pronounce inauthentic patristic texts conflicting with current Catholic theology and practice.<sup>7</sup> All the more problematic, he suggested, were therefore cases where his opponents utilized patristic texts in their anti-Protestant polemic even though some of their co-religionists ('quidam ex eorum numero') had previously recognized them as forgeries.<sup>8</sup> In this category he included the

Acts of John, then commonly ascribed to Peter's companion Prochorus, the Shepherd of Hermas, ps.-Clement's *Recognitions*, and also the Dionysian corpus.

Gerhard initially notes instances of how the Areopagite is used by his opponents: Dionysius is cited in favour of the sacrifice of the Mass; the use of chrismation in baptism; the veneration of saints; purgatory; the canonical status of the Book of Wisdom; and monastic vows. Indeed, Gerhard continues, 'who can mention all those who have produced testimonies against us from Dionysius' books?'.<sup>9</sup> As his subsequent citations elucidate, major figures of the Catholic Reform, including Sixtus of Siena (1520–1569) and Caesar Baronius (1538–1607), insisted on the authenticity of the Areopagite's books. More significantly, some went so far as to imply only a mind as heretical as that of the German reformer could have ever doubted their first-century origin. Thus, the Jesuit Alfonso Salmerón (1515–1585) quoted Luther's dismissal of Dionysius from the *Babylonian Captivity* noting in the margin, according to Gerhard, that this was 'Martin Luther's worthless judgement of Dionysius' works'.<sup>10</sup>

Just over a century after the publication of Luther's pugnacious treatise, then, the question of Dionysius' authority had firmly become part of the controversial theology of the age. This development continued a logic that had first emerged at the Leipzig Debate. Catholic apologists vindicated his identity with the first-century Areopagite at least in part because of the value of his testimony, while the same consideration made it attractive for Protestants to join the chorus of doubters.

This transformation of an originally scholarly debate into a cause celebre of the confessional age had an intriguing collateral. Luther, as we have seen, never displayed great interest in the historical questions surrounding the origins of the Dionysian corpus. He certainly did not advance the case of the critics in any notable way. Nevertheless, anti-Protestant polemicists increasingly sought to tie the critics' case to the divisive figure of the reformer. The uncompromising tone the latter had adopted in the *Babylonian Captivity* may have facilitated this tendency. In 1613, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) had gone so far as to opine that 'learned and Catholic men' had no doubts about the authenticity of Dionysius' works; 'only Lutheran heretics and some ignoramuses (*'scioli'*), Erasmus, Valla and few others denied that [they] are the works of the holy Dionysius of the Areopagus'.<sup>11</sup> This, of course, was not true, and Gerhard must have had great pleasure in reminding his readers of the much more cautious judgements issued by many respected Catholic scholars including Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1534) and Antonio Possevino (1533–1611) as well as, indeed, Bellarmine and Sixtus themselves in their more scholarly moments.<sup>12</sup>

For Gerhard, the case on Dionysius' authenticity is closed; he stands convicted as a fraud, but this raises a more important question:<sup>13</sup>

What is the character of these works, whose antiquity cannot be traced or proved beyond a point in time, six centuries after [the historical] Dionysius' death? Given that his fraud has now been exposed, how can it be excused that this person, whoever he was, wanted to insert himself into the Apostolic age and even wrote to Timothy, Titus, and John the Evangelist and said that he saw the body of the virgin together

with the apostles? Who would not rightly condemn these things in a more recent person?

There is, then, a moral case closely connected with the historical one. A moderate defender of the Areopagite might argue that the author, while unknown and certainly not an immediate disciple of St Paul, was still an important part of the patristic witness whose testimony therefore deserves credit on the basis of Gerhard's own principles. Against this, the Lutheran divine insists that the kind of forgery he committed inevitably discredits its author whoever he was and whenever he may have composed his texts.

The stakes were not, however, raised this high only by the critics. In fact, an analogous argument is encountered in the writings of those who sought to vindicate Dionysius' authenticity. They, too, maintained that he had to be either genuine or a fraud and if the latter, his authority could not be salvaged.<sup>14</sup> Yet they went on to press that his theological and spiritual authority was so evident from his writings that this *ipso facto* guaranteed their genuineness. This dynamic made elusive any potential middle ground: either Dionysius was a first-century writer and, as such, a key witness for the Catholic side; or he was a later writer who fraudulently assumed a quasi-apostolic identity which implicitly deprived him of any theological or spiritual authority. For a Lutheran apologist such as Johann Gerhard, the decision between these two options does not seem to have been difficult. Dionysius thus joined the rank of other discredited pseudo-authorities.<sup>15</sup>

## GEORG CALIXTUS

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Calixtus, who spent his career teaching theology at the University of Helmstedt, was the great irenicist among the Lutheran divines of the early seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> His earnest desire to dialogue with Calvinists and Catholics earned him the life-long suspicion of his more intransigent Lutheran colleagues. For his project of searching the common ground between the divided ecclesiastical communities, patristic study was, unsurprisingly, of great importance. Calixtus was a great believer in the *consensus antiquitatis*; in fact, the term *consensus quinquesaecularis*, so popular among later irenic and ecumenical thinkers, was first coined to mock his theology.<sup>17</sup>

When it came to Dionysius, however, his position is hardly distinguishable from that of his contemporary, Gerhard. He touches on the issue in a wide-ranging discussion of Vincent of Lérins' *Communitorium* emphasizing the hierarchical character of patristic authority as not all Fathers have pronounced with equal authority on all doctrinal questions at all times. To this, he briefly adds the following comment:

Works and writings, however that have been falsely ascribed to great men—Canons to the Apostles, books to Clement of Rome and Dionysius of the Areopagus [...]—have to be set aside and added to the testimony from dubious sources. No erudite person will doubt that these texts must not be admitted [as testimony].<sup>18</sup>

Thus far, then, Calixtus merely confirms the picture gained more extensively from Gerhard's compendious text. Yet elsewhere, his work also proves that it was difficult for Lutheran divines simply to dismiss Dionysius *tout court*. In his 1619 *Epitome theologiae*, Calixtus included an overview of Christological doctrine, drawing largely on the Ecumenical Councils as well as patristic authors such as Cyril, Leo the Great, and notably John of Damascus. In connection with his account of the communication of idioms, he appealed to the Damascene's discussion of the one, theandric energy, a concept this author, of course, had adopted from Dionysius. Calixtus acknowledged this debt in the following words:

Dionysius, whoever he was, while not the Areopagite and disciple of Paul mentioned in Acts, was nevertheless an ancient and learned author.<sup>19</sup>

There was, then, a middle ground. There had to be one considering the enormous importance the Damascene had as a theological authority for Lutheran Orthodoxy *and* his evident indebtedness to the Areopagite. Dionysius could, as Calixtus here intimates, be acknowledged as a patristic authority albeit not a first-century one. Yet this middle ground was vanishingly small and rarely occupied by any theological writer of the period. Even an irenic mind such as Calixtus' barely comes close to it in the present passage which, moreover, seems unique in his works. For the most part, Calixtus confirms the consensus among early-modern Lutheran divines keen to exploit whatever patristic support they could find: the disproof of Dionysius' historical authenticity removed him from the list of authoritative Fathers of the Church.

## JOHANN ARNDT

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From the authors reviewed thus far, one could gain the impression that of Luther's engagement with Dionysius only his sharp dismissal of this author had an impact on subsequent thinkers. Neither Gerhard nor Calixtus showed themselves much interested in the significance of the Areopagite for the mystical tradition or indeed in the question of what right, if any, this tradition might claim within their own Church.

It would, however, be entirely mistaken to conclude from this observation that the complex relationship between the reformer and the mystical heritage was without influence on later generations of Lutherans. On the contrary, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that few questions were debated throughout the centuries following the Reformation with as much intensity, passion, and occasional bitterness as the legitimacy of mystical spirituality within Lutheran Protestantism.<sup>20</sup>

Key among those who advocated a synthesis of Lutheranism and the mystical tradition was Johann Arndt.<sup>21</sup> He was no university professor but worked as a pastor in various small towns in central Germany. Arndt was attacked throughout his career by the stauncher representatives of Lutheran Orthodoxy although more moderate divines,

including the great Johann Gerhard himself, defended and supported him. Thus, Arndt remained part of the Lutheran Church, and his works were never officially condemned or disowned. In fact, his main writing, *True Christianity*, first published in four volumes in 1610, became the single most widely read publication within Lutheranism apart from the Bible. Its character, however, and with it the true allegiance of its author, has remained controversial. In compiling the book, Arndt freely used existing texts by medieval mystics, such as John Tauler (1300–1361), and the writings of early modern spiritualists, notably Theophrastus von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus (1493–1541).<sup>22</sup>

Yet while scholarly discussion on Arndt's place in early-modern religious history is in flux, it is beyond doubt that within the Lutheran tradition as it existed at the turn of the seventeenth century, Arndt was the single most influential figure recalling the early Luther's association with the mystical tradition.<sup>23</sup> It was he who reissued the *Theologia Germanica* including Luther's famous preface with its stunningly unequivocal endorsement of this book's content (Arndt 1605). Against a tendency within Lutheranism to align the mystical tradition with Catholicism on the one hand and the *Schwärmer* (enthusiasts) on the other, Arndt insisted on its rightful place within his own Church.

There is no indication that Dionysius was a problematic author for Arndt. The Lutheran theologian abhorred the scholastic controversies of his time; it therefore comes as no surprise that he was uninterested in the controversy about the Areopagite's historical identity. If he held a view one way or another, he certainly never expressed it. In at least one place, Arndt quoted Dionysius extensively as an authority without qualification.<sup>24</sup> He must, moreover, have been aware that the Areopagite was of crucial importance for the medieval mystical writers he actively sought to champion within the Lutheran Church.

If there is no reason to think that Arndt distanced himself from Dionysius, however, it seems nevertheless clear that the Areopagite was not of primary importance for the Lutheran pastor either. We have seen that the early Luther drew on the mystical Dionysius for two crucial insights: the hiddenness of God and the emphasis on a holistic, experiential theology that went beyond the arid intellectualism of the scholastic tradition. Of those two, only the latter appears to have occupied Arndt and influenced the shape of his thought. In other words, while Arndt placed a strong emphasis on the subjective experience of faith in the believer and their personal, practical commitment to a life in discipleship of Christ, his theology was largely free from qualms regarding God's unknowability and the consequent need for an ascent to the divine through negations. Yet Arndt did not have to hark back to Dionysius to find support for the concept of a practical Christianity, which he could find more distinctly in other texts available to him, such as the *Theologia Germanica*, Tauler's sermons, or the *Imitation of Christ*. It therefore seems that he developed the foundations of his spiritual interpretation of Lutheran thought without direct recourse to the Dionysian writings even though it is, of course, arguable that by using medieval mystical writings, Arndt indirectly drew on the Areopagite.

There is one aspect of Dionysian thought, however, that makes its appearance in Arndt's writing while it had been absent from earlier Lutheran sources.<sup>25</sup> Book Four of *True Christianity* is entitled *Liber Naturae: How the great book of the world in Christian interpretation witnesses God and leads to God*. In the hallowed tradition of treatises on the *Hexaëmeron*, Arndt here offers a full account of natural philosophy based on the creation narrative of Genesis 1. Consequently, the book's first chapter deals with light, and Arndt, faithful to the book's title, launches his discussion by asking how the visible, physical reality of light points to the creator. Pride of place in his response is given to 'the interpreter of St Dionysius' who raised the question of why God created light first and answered as follows:

[This is] 'because from the most intelligible, divine light itself emanates directly the light which of all things is most similar to God.' Therefore he [sc. the interpreter] calls 'light the image of God's goodness' and says that 'super-intelligible light' is in God, 'intelligible light' is in angels and human beings, and the 'visible light' is in the sun.<sup>26</sup>

The unnamed commentator, from whom these ideas are taken, is Ficino; the interpretation refers to *Divine Names* IV 4.<sup>27</sup> It is thus the Platonic Dionysius popular with Renaissance Humanists that is in view here. Luther, as we have seen, encountered the Areopagite in this interpretation as well, but there is no indication that the reformer was ever attracted by this kind of speculation.

As Arndt continues his account, his use of the Areopagite becomes even more distinct. He quotes verbatim lengthy excerpts from the *Divine Names*. The visible light emanating from the sun, he argues, is direct evidence for God's providential care for his creation as it allows us to perceive the intelligible structure of the world. At the same time, it symbolizes another kind of light which directly indicates the presence of the divine within the created world:

God created light with the purpose that through it all creatures be known and distinguished from each other in their own external form, shape, beauty, and loveliness. From this, we have to conclude that there must be another, hidden light by means of which all internal forms and shapes of all creatures are known. From this light nothing can hide, be it as secret as it may. And this is the eternal Wisdom of God which is named 'radiance of the eternal light' (Wisdom 7, 26), according to the right kind of natural created light.<sup>28</sup>

It is notable that the reference to divine Wisdom as present in creation is not taken from either Ficino or Dionysius.<sup>29</sup> This suggests that, despite his nod towards the tradition, Arndt's interest here goes beyond the contemplation of the divine through the intelligibly 'illuminated' structure of God's creation. Rather, in line with other early-modern natural philosophers, Arndt, who had his own chemical laboratory next to his study,<sup>30</sup> derived from the Platonic–Dionysian tradition a justification to investigate the cosmos in its internal, physical structure.



These links cannot be further pursued in the present place, but they point to Arndt's importance for early-modern Christian theosophy, a movement which, while always marginal, occupied a considerable place in the intellectual life of Lutheran Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries until it became a major source of inspiration for German Idealism and, in particular, for F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854).<sup>31</sup> A thorough investigation of the reception of Dionysius in this intellectual tradition is likely to confirm the picture yielded by this analysis of Arndt's writing: the Areopagite remained a recognized authority, but his works were not, for the most part, foundational for the movement or its ideas.

## PHILIPP SPENER

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With Spener, we move to the latter half of the sixteenth century. The Pietist movement, whose main spokesperson he became, saw Arndt as one of their most prominent forerunners. In fact, Spener's most influential work, *Pia desideria*, was first published as a Foreword to his own republication of Arndt's *sermons*.<sup>32</sup> Yet it was Arndt's emphasis on individual faith and the practical discipleship of Jesus that fascinated Spener and his associates more than his entanglement with spiritualist natural philosophy and theosophy.

Even though Spener's background was partly academic, it is important for his theological outlook that, like Arndt before him, he worked as a pastor during the most important years of his career, first in Frankfurt, subsequently in Dresden, and finally in Berlin.<sup>33</sup> His movement was strongly inspired by an opposition to the dry scholasticism of Lutheran Orthodoxy whose emphasis on correct doctrine appeared to lack any substantive connection with the practical life of faith. Thus far, Spener saw himself as taking up the mantle of Luther's own critique of medieval scholasticism, while his opponents accused him of betraying the Reformation principle of *sola fide* by insisting on the need of a holy life.

Spener drew on the resources that had already appealed to Arndt and, before him, to the early Luther. He published new editions of the *Theologia Germanica* and Tauler explicitly endorsing Arndt's earlier publication. He regularly emphasized Luther's own enthusiastic assessment of these medieval mystical texts.<sup>34</sup> Since these works, but also Arndt's *True Christianity*, contained explicit references to the Areopagite, they alone permit the conclusion that Spener cannot have considered Dionysius an inherently problematic author.

We possess Spener's explicit assessment of the Areopagite in a text meant for the attention of university theologians. Entitled *On Hindrances to Theological Study* (*De impedimentis studii theologici*), the text proposes certain reforms of theological education and, to this end, gives an overview of important aspects of the discipline as they should be covered by a university course.<sup>35</sup> In this context, Spener also discusses mystical theology. It is controversial, he admits, but ought to be recognized due to its undoubted antiquity:

Its name was used in the primitive church (in *Ecclesia prisca*), and very ancient witnesses to it are still in existence. For while we refuse to grant to Dionysius the title of the Areopagite, no one can deny that he is very ancient. Moreover, there were others before and after him who passed on this mysticism even if not presented in systematic form. Earnest and upright men complain that errors have been introduced into mystical treatises from philosophy, in particular from Platonism [...], which have corrupted a matter that is otherwise laudable.

I am certain that, while the papal darkness lasted, more survived in mystical theology of what is healthy and strong—albeit not in pure form—than in thorny and polemical scholasticism which possesses little that could turn the heart. Therefore, I doubt that our great Luther owed as much to any scholastic—or confessed to such a debt—as he owed to Tauler and other writers of this kind.<sup>36</sup>

Granted, Spener continues, that mystics occasionally tended towards religious ‘enthusiasm’, but no one throws away gold, silver, or gems when covered in dirt rather than cleanse the precious objects from whatever obscures their beauty. Similarly, mysticism needs to be preserved and restored to its valuable core.<sup>37</sup> Considered in this manner, it is revealed not as a separate theology—after all, there is only one true theology—but a particular method. Whereas dogmatics (‘*theologia thetica*’) operates at the level of intellect and rationality:

[...] mystical theology is not only conducted in the intellect but in the whole soul and in all its faculties in which the divine image has to be restored.<sup>38</sup>

While dogmatics seeks to inform the mind, mystical theology aims to ‘form the will’.<sup>39</sup> Understood in this manner, Spener concludes, it is unobjectionable. In the principal writers of the school, Tauler, Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), Jean Gerson (1363–1429), and the anonymous of the *Theologia Germanica*,<sup>40</sup> one may not find as much learning as in scholastic theologians, but the reader is stirred into truly pious feeling and religious action.<sup>41</sup>

This is nothing less than an apology for mystical theology, and it is remarkable how close the concerns Spener here ascribes to this tradition are to his own programme of theological and spiritual reform with its emphasis on personal, existential faith and its practical application. There cannot, then, be any doubt that the appeal to give a place to mystical writers in theological studies is in many ways at the heart of Spener’s proposal for a reform of ministerial education.<sup>42</sup>

The Areopagite is evidently recognized as an important witness to that tradition. As for his authenticity, Spener adopts the ‘middle’ position we have previously observed in Calixtus: while not the first-century disciple of Paul, Dionysius is an ancient and therefore principally trustworthy author. His writings, Spener seems to think, are the best available evidence for an origin of mystical theology in the early Church. Since in Spener’s account the right of mysticism partly rests on its claim to antiquity, this point must have carried some weight for him.

At the same time, Spener does not mention specifically Dionysian insights that would make his writings worthy of recommendation. The Areopagite is pointedly omitted

from the list of spiritually valuable authors included in Spener's argument. The reason for this reserve may well be that the typically Dionysian negative theology, which had been crucial for Luther's concept of divine hiddenness, was of as limited significance for Spener as it had previously been for Arndt. While the major contribution of the tradition, its emphasis on practical, experiential faith, was for Luther also of Areopagitic origin, Spener seems to follow Arndt in ascribing it mostly to the later medieval mystical authors.

Spener thus continues the trajectory that flows from the early Luther's anti-scholastic fascination with spiritual authors. As we have consistently seen, the ultimate vanishing point of this trajectory was no other than Dionysius, but the older Luther himself, as well as his later followers, prioritized the value of later mystics as their guides towards a holistic life of faith. The cosmological interest in the Areopagite that was evident in Arndt, has no obvious counterpart in Spener.<sup>43</sup>

## GOTTFRIED ARNOLD

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Arnold is a uniquely fascinating figure at the turn of the eighteenth century. He is often described as a radical Pietist<sup>44</sup> but can equally be claimed for the early Enlightenment.<sup>45</sup> His publicly declared decision to resign, at age thirty-two, from his professorial position at Gießen University (1698), sent shockwaves through Germany.<sup>46</sup> Gießen's theologians were mostly affiliated with the Pietist movement, but even there Arnold felt that the detachment of university theology from the life of faith was too strong.

Soon after, in 1699/1700, Arnold published the work that has most defined his reputation, *Impartial History of Church and Heresies*. Building on earlier Lutheran historiography, notably the *Magdeburg Centuries*, Arnold pushed the Reformation critique of ecclesiastical corruption to an extreme: from an early point in its history, the institutional Church was in decline and not truly the seat of the Holy Spirit. The Reformation briefly interrupted this development, but the established Churches emerging from it soon returned to the unhealthy ways of the earlier Catholic Church. In a dramatic transvaluation of values, Arnold instead identified the true Church in those movements the institution had traditionally vilified as heretical.

For this theological re-evaluation, Arnold constructed an alternative history of Christianity as a history of mystical movements. Thus far, his 1703 *Historie und Beschreibung der mystischen Theologie* (*History and Description of Mystical Theology*) was the companion piece to his historical *opus magnum*. We have seen how Spener considered the medieval mystics as guardians of evangelical truth during an otherwise dark period of the Church's history. Arnold, who for a while was Spener's personal protégé, adopted this notion in a radicalized version: mystical theology, for him, is true Christianity as separate from the hierarchical Church of all ages. It is in mysticism and in mysticism only that pure faith and a strong commitment to Christian practice survived through the centuries.<sup>47</sup>

To sustain this construction, proof for the ancient origins and the historical continuity of the mystical tradition was of fundamental importance. We have seen Spener cite Dionysius as evidence for the existence of mysticism in the early Church. It cannot, therefore, surprise that for Arnold's more ambitious argument the Areopagite assumes an importance unseen in earlier Lutheran literature. In fact, Arnold identifies Dionysius in unambiguous terms as the apostolic point of origin of the mystical tradition, the guarantor of its emergence in the immediate environment of Christianity's first historical appearance.<sup>48</sup> Strictly speaking, he explains in his *Historie*, the true, mystical religion began with Adam and has its witnesses throughout both parts of the Bible.<sup>49</sup> Directly after expounding the biblical testimony, however, Arnold devotes an entire chapter of his account to the Areopagite.

At this point, he takes a step that few if any earlier Protestant authors were willing to take: he sides with those who defend the authenticity of the Dionysian writings.<sup>50</sup> As in Johann Gerhard, therefore, the bulk of Arnold's extensive discussion of the Areopagite is taken up by a survey of the early-modern debate about the historical provenance of his works. The two theologians' interpretations of the available evidence could not, however, be more different from each other. Where for the early sixteenth-century divine the case was decided against Dionysius' claim to be Paul's Athenian convert, Arnold passionately argues against this very conclusion even though the intervening decades had seen the publication of the single most comprehensive treatment of the question which confirmed the position of the critics.<sup>51</sup>

On one point, however, both agree: there is an intimate connection between this issue and the theological authority of the author. For Gerhard, as we have seen, the Areopagite had lost almost all credibility on account of his forgery. Arnold turned the same argument on its head. These writings had to be genuine, he claimed:

[...] because otherwise this author would have to be an obvious liar and forger who had discovered, under an alien name, holy, godly, and lofty things which no mind had known. These two, however, can impossibly go together, especially since this author writes so very blissfully and wonderfully.<sup>52</sup>

Earlier Protestants, beginning with Luther himself, had been attracted to the critical position in part because of the use their Catholic rivals made of Dionysius as an early witness to a variety of doctrines and practices at variance with their own views. It is characteristic that Arnold is not held back by such concerns. From the vantage point of his radical critique of institutionalized religion, the confessional conflicts of previous centuries had to him evidently lost much of their significance. He freely refers to a wide range of 'mystical' authors from the entirety of Christian history including contemporaneous writers from all major denominations. While he is keen to remind his readers of Luther's positive assessment of Tauler and the *Theologia Germanica*,<sup>53</sup> he makes no apology for quoting the major mystics of the Catholic Reform and even endorses the teaching of Robert Bellarmine<sup>54</sup> or the mysticism of Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642) as exemplary.<sup>55</sup> The agreement between these extremely different individuals to him

underlines the contrast between the true, mystical theology and the false, conflictual theology of the schools.

Yet if Arnold was supremely ecumenical in his acceptance of theological authorities, he had no time for the notion of Dionysian mysticism as a universal truth that could equally be encountered in religions and philosophies of all ages. Specifically, he strongly opposed the notion that the true sources of mystical theology lay in Plato and his school.<sup>56</sup> Instead, he argued for a fundamental continuity between Dionysius and the earlier biblical tradition. To explain existing parallels with Platonic authors, Arnold cited the notorious dependency motif—Plato had encountered Jewish Scriptures during his travels—and the fact that some teachers of the Church had been trained in this philosophy before converting to Christianity.<sup>57</sup>

In Gottfried Arnold, then, the Areopagite emerges as a major witness to the original, mystical truth of Christianity. Throughout his work, the Pietist author appeals to Dionysius' writings including the *Hierarchies* as well as the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names*. While clearly inscribing himself into a trajectory from the early Luther to Johann Arndt and Philipp Spener, Arnold went further than any of them in his affirmation of the authority of the Areopagite. In this attitude he can seem surprisingly close to early-modern Catholic authors, but this proximity does not in his case indicate a secretly harboured preference for the Roman Church, but rather a radical critique of institutionalized religion in all its forms and shapes. It was this theological position that made Arnold surprisingly indifferent to the confessional boundaries through which most of his contemporaries defined their own theological stance.

## LATER DEVELOPMENTS

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It is arguable that the increasingly powerful case against the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus contributed to his marginalization even among those keenest to preserve and build on the mystical Luther. Arnold's countervailing position was and remained an outlier. While his intellectual influence loomed large over subsequent historical theology, no eighteenth-century Lutheran seems to have adopted his unconditional embrace of the Areopagite. More intriguingly, perhaps, Dionysius is also largely absent from the *cause celebre* of the age, the critique of Platonic influence on early Christian thought. Notably, Lorenz von Mosheim's (1693–1755) celebrated essay on the *Deformation of the Church by the Younger Platonists*, included in his Latin translation of Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System*, does not contain a single reference to the Areopagite.<sup>58</sup>

The picture remains the same in the nineteenth century. Dionysian ideas are arguably present in German Idealism and, specifically, in the thought of F. J. W. Schelling, but any direct influence is difficult to prove. The extensive historical account of the 'Christian philosophy of religion' in F. C. Baur's (1792–1860) *Die christliche Gnosis* (1835), heavily indebted to idealist thought, does not refer to the Areopagite.<sup>59</sup> Throughout the century, mysticism remains a controversial topic among Lutheran theologians, but debates

centre on medieval authors and their relationship to later Reformation theology. Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) uses the word ‘Areopagitic’ as a term of abuse to criticize apophaticism which, in his view, vitiates the revealed character of the Christian God.<sup>60</sup> Yet he, too, does not show specific interest in the Dionysian writings.

All twentieth-century reception of Dionysius occurred under the influence of the scholarship of Koch and Stiglmayr.<sup>61</sup> Their originality did not lie in the claim that the author of the Dionysian corpus was different from the Areopagite of Acts 17, but in their proof that he depended on Proclus, the fifth-century Athenian Platonist. In this way, Dionysius, who had previously been dismissed from Christian history simply as an unknown forger, re-entered the stage as the disciple of a Neoplatonist philosopher who wrote at the very end of late antiquity. He therefore became, at this point, a main bone of contention in the continuing debate about the extent of Platonic influence on Christian theology and its legitimacy.

In this situation, major representatives of the Lutheran tradition took a clear stance against Dionysius. Most notably, Anders Nygren’s (1890–1978) influential but controversial study *Agape and Eros* assigned to Dionysius a highly problematical, mediating role of a fundamentally un-Christian understanding of love as erotic desire:

The ideas thus invested with apostolic authority were nothing but the common Hellenistic Eros theory. Now no one could help seeing that the Christianity of Dionysius was entirely different from that of Paul and of the New Testament in general; but this ceased to be disturbing when Dionysius’ view was being taken as the deeper, ‘mystical’ meaning of Christianity.<sup>62</sup>

For Nygren, Dionysius is not the originator of the Hellenization of Christianity; this tendency began much earlier. He does, however, represent a particularly radical version of it which, the Swedish theologian implies, could not have been successful had it not cloaked itself in quasi-apostolic authority. Thus far, the historical position Dionysius assumes in Nygren’s account, as a transitional figure from late ancient to medieval Christianity, conforms to the traditional, U-shaped Protestant narrative of Christian history reaching its low point in the Middle Ages.

While it is, of course, possible to see in Nygren’s critique of Dionysius a continuation of earlier objections to the Areopagite in Lutheran theology and by the reformer himself, it is notable how distant Nygren’s use of Dionysius is from that prevalent among Lutherans of earlier centuries. *Agape and Eros* is one of several theological attempts to counter Friedrich Nietzsche’s notorious critique that the Christian idea of love was ‘the triumphant crown’ grown from the ‘trunk of the tree of revenge and hatred’, an outgrowth of *ressentiment*, as he called it.<sup>63</sup> Within Nietzsche’s genealogy, Christianity continued a process begun earlier in Judaism and Platonism; thus far, it was ‘Platonism for the people’.

Following the philosopher Max Scheler (1874–1928),<sup>64</sup> Nygren responded to this critique with the juxtaposition of two types of love, erotic desire and agapeic gift. Of those, the former fell afoul of Nietzsche’s critique, but the latter did not. While *eros* was rightly



associated with the Platonic tradition, only *agape* was genuinely Christian. Dionysius, then, represents the most radical replacement of the Christian idea of agapeic love with the Platonic *eros*. This charge, it is true, echoes Luther's verdict in the *Babylonian Captivity*, but it is otherwise hard to square Nygren's unqualified condemnation of the *Mystical Theology* with the reformer's nuanced assessment of it. Ultimately, the Swedish theologian is part of the anti-mystical trajectory within Lutheranism which considerably simplified the intuitions that had motivated Luther himself (cf. the author's analysis in ch. 32).

## CONCLUSION

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The Lutheran reception of Dionysius can be summarized in two separate but interrelated narratives. Both have their origin in Luther whose relationship to the Areopagite has turned out to be deeply ambiguous. Both, furthermore, are intimately connected with other issues that loomed large in the Reformation and its aftermath.

On the one hand, there is the mystical Dionysius. The early Luther drew heavily on some of the Areopagite's ideas before he encountered them also in more recent works by German mystics. Yet the reformer became increasingly aware that these writings could also be used by his most fervent opponents, both Catholics and 'enthusiasts'. His later statements, therefore, are more reserved and often polemical although he never fully distanced himself from the fundamental insights he had gained earlier from the Areopagitic writings. In fact, he concedes that the problems may primarily be the fault of some of Dionysius' interpreters. The affirmation of the mystical tradition subsequently became the hallmark of the Pietistic-spiritual wing of Lutheranism beginning with Johann Arndt. Unlike Luther, however, neither Arndt nor Philipp Spener seemed interested in Dionysius' apophaticism, and for their reception of Luther's anti-scholastic emphasis on theology as a holistic, existential practice, Tauler and the *Theologia Germanica* were overall more important than the Areopagite whom they nonetheless accepted as the originator of the mystical tradition. Gottfried Arnold was alone in his unqualified appropriation of the Dionysian corpus in his account of mystical theology.

On the other hand, Dionysius became associated early on with certain doctrines and practices that became controversial in the sixteenth century. Of particular importance in this regard were the *Hierarchies*, but relevant passages were also taken from the *Divine Names*. Beginning with John Eck, Catholic authors appealed to these texts as evidence for the antiquity of their own views whereas their opponents were intent to refute them. In this connection, the originally humanistic critique of Dionysius' historical identity became aligned with the confessional controversies. Luther's sharply dismissive statement in the *Babylonian Captivity*, probably fuelled by his previous experience at the Leipzig Debate, soon became a major point of reference for writers on both sides. For the major Lutheran divines, the Areopagite was a fraud who had lost all entitlement to be treated as a patristic authority. This made it difficult to embrace his writings even



in areas unconnected with the confessional conflict although some allowance had to be made for his apparent recognition by Eastern authors such as John of Damascus and Maximus Confessor who were major authorities for the Lutherans themselves.

Over time, the two trajectories intersected in ways that were detrimental to the reputation of Dionysius among Lutherans. The growing suspicion that he was 'a fraud', made him an easy target for opponents of mystical theology in general.<sup>65</sup> Those keen to defend his writings as part of the Christian tradition, were nevertheless concerned about his apparently Platonic leanings. While the theological currents he had originally inspired continued to exist, his writings were rarely cited or discussed after the turn of the eighteenth century. Major theological movements since the nineteenth century, including the Ritschl School, dialectical theology, and the Luther Renaissance, depicted the Areopagite as the epitome of a wrong-headed approach to the Christian faith. Against this latter-day consensus, which can easily give the impression that a rejection of the Areopagite has always been a constitutive part of the Lutheran tradition, it is important to recall the important and intricate ways in which Dionysius was, in fact, part of this tradition from its very inception.

## NOTES

1. The classic study of Gerhard's thought remains Troeltsch 1891. See also: Wallmann 1961; Schröder 1983; Fluegge 2018.
2. See further Stewart 2015.
3. Cf. Stewart 2015: 134–143.
4. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 549–730. This and the following references are from Book I, Part II, Chapter XIII.
5. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 549.
6. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 609 ff.
7. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 612.
8. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 618.
9. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 621–622.
10. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 621–622.
11. Bellarmine 1613:35.
12. Gerhard 1634–1637: 1, 622–624.
13. Gerhard 1634–1637: 624.
14. Cf. Halloix 1644: 537.
15. This picture is confirmed by the various references to Dionysius across the vast *Loci Theologici*: cf. Gerhard 1622–1634: 10, 44.
16. On Calixtus cf. Wallmann 1961; Stewart 2015: 143–159.
17. Stewart 2015: 149.
18. G. Calixtus, *Proemium ad Augustini „De doctrina Christiana” et Vincentii Lerinensis ‘Commonitorium’* (1629), in: Calixt 1972–1982: 1, 395, 28–396, 5.
19. G. Calixtus, *Epitome theologiae* (1619) in: Calixt 1972–1982: 2, 198, 21–23.
20. For an overview cf. Wallmann 2010.
21. On Arndt see Erb 1979: 1–17 ('Introduction'); Illg 2019; and the instructive but critical studies collected in Schneider 2006.

22. For detailed studies on this question see: Braw 1997. Schneider 2006: 197–215; Otto/Schneider 2007.
23. Wallmann 2010a: 109.
24. Arndt 1610: 4–6.
25. For what follows, Cf. Neumann 2013: 187–192.
26. Arndt 1610: v 3–4. The quotations are in Latin, the author's comments in German.
27. Ficino 1962: 1056–1057.
28. Arndt 1610: 4.
29. Neumann 2013: 188.
30. Wallmann 2010a: 112.
31. Gilly 2007: 197–199.
32. Maschke 1992: 190.
33. On Spener's life and career cf. Wallmann 1986.
34. Wallman 1986: 256.
35. Spener 1690: B1r–I4v. A selective and somewhat unreliable English translation has been published in Erb 1983: 35–40.
36. Spener 1690: G3v–G4r
37. Spener 1690: G3v–G4r
38. Spener 1690: G4v
39. Spener 1690: H1r
40. Anonymous 1893.
41. Spener 1690: H1r
42. Cf. however the divergent assessments cited by Wallmann 2010b.
43. Wallmann 2008: 339–341.
44. Schneider 2007.
45. The most comprehensive treatment remains Seeberg 1964.
46. Seeberg 1919/20: 282.
47. Arnold 1703, ch. 1, esp. 15–16.
48. Arnold 1703: 240–241.
49. Arnold 1703: 222–238.
50. Arnold 1703, ch. 10, esp. 255–267.
51. Daillé 1666.
52. Arnold 1703: 258.
53. Arnold 1703: 212–213.
54. Arnold 1703: 186.
55. Arnold 1703: 206–207.
56. Arnold 1703: 199–206.
57. Arnold 1703: 45–46.
58. Mosheim 1773. In his *Ecclesiastical History Ancient and Modern*, Mosheim included a brief and duly dismissive reference to Dionysius: Mosheim 1819: 283–284.
59. But cf. Baur 1834: 377–378 for an interesting assessment of the Areopagite's role in the development of Catholic theology with special emphasis on his importance for Aquinas.
60. Ritschl 1902: 272.
61. Stiglmayr 1895; Koch 1900.
62. Nygren 1953: 577.
63. Nietzsche 2006: 18.
64. Scheler 1912.
65. Cf. again Mosheim 1773: 283.

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## CHAPTER 34

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# DIONYSIUS' RECEPTION IN THE ENGLISH- SPEAKING WORLD

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ANDREW LOUTH

FIRST of all, a word about the clumsiness of the title. It could not have been Dionysius' reception in England, for a whole strand of this essay concerns France, in particular Cambrai, where an English Catholic Benedictine community lived in exile after the Reformation; nor could it have been Dionysius' reception among the English, for several of the protagonists of this tale were Welsh, and we should resist the tendency to identify speakers of English with the English.

This chapter will fall into three parts, like a sermon, and, like a sermon, the threefold distinction is more than a bit artificial, but one has to find some way of organizing one's material.

The beginning of the English reception of Dionysius the Areopagite lies in the fourteenth century. In the latter half of that century (almost certainly), that is, after the terrible visitation of the Black Death, someone whose name we do not know, but whose works we are now familiar with, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, translated into English Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*, calling it, with admirable accuracy (no muddying of the waters by rendering *μυστική* 'mystical'), *Deonise Hid Divinite*.<sup>1</sup> It is a bit more than a translation, for in translating John the Saracen's (John Sarracenus) Latin version into Middle English, he availed himself of Gallus' commentary on the treatise in order to make clearer what he thought Dionysius had intended in what is a very concise text. Something of what this entailed is discussed in Mark Edwards' paper, but there a very particular twist in his understanding of the *Mystical Theology* which is important for our story. For example, at the end of what he regards as Dionysius' prefatory prayer (modern printed editions of the text, based doubtless on the MSS, make no such definite break here: they move seamlessly from prayer to treatise, which I think makes more sense), the author of the *Cloud* translates the Saracen's *Igitur ista mihi quidem sint oratione postulata*, which doesn't correspond to anything in the Greek, but marks

the transition from prayer to treatise, by 'And for alle þees þinges ben abouen mynde, þerfore wiþ affeccyon abouen mynde as I may, I desire to purchase hem vnto me wiþ þis preier'.<sup>2</sup> This rather windy translation refers back to the prayer and begs for God's help. But 'wiþ affeccyon' is an addition. It is an addition that occurs elsewhere in the translation of this treatise, indeed several times. A few lines further on, the author of the *Cloud* translated *ad supersubstantialiam divinarum tenebrarum radium, cuncta auferens et a cunctis absolutus, sursum ageris* as 'þou schalt be drawn up abouen mynde in affeccoun to þe souereyn-substancial beme of þe godliche derknes, alle þinges þus done away':<sup>3</sup> the translator has added 'in affeccoun' to the Latin. In doing this, he is only following what Gallus himself had said in his paraphrase; in this way he is conveying Gallus' interpretation of the passage, even though it is not explicitly there in the Latin text he was translating. This addition is very important and informs the whole approach to prayer that we find in the *Cloud*. Prayer may be raising the mind to God, to use a traditional definition, but the mind raised to God in this fashion is not exercising its mental powers, it is really renouncing and transcending them, and relying instead on feeling, love, affection (*affectio* has, since at least Bernard, the sense of adherence through love).<sup>4</sup> As it is expressed in *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

... of God him-self can no man þink. & þerfore I wole leue al þat þing þat I can þink, & chese to my loue þat þing þat I can-not þink. For whi he may wel be loued, bot not þouzt. By loue may he be getyn & holden; bot bi þouzt neiþer.<sup>5</sup>

Loving God in this way by renouncing knowledge of him is spoken of by the author of the *Cloud* as entering the 'þicke cloude of vnknowyng', an expression borrowed from Dionysius that assumes an importance in his thought that goes beyond what we find in the Areopagite himself. It is identified with contemplation which he sees as a blind 'stering of loue';<sup>6</sup> later on in that chapter he comments: '& smyte apon þat þicke cloude of vnknowyng wiþ a scharp darte of longing loue'.<sup>7</sup> Contemplation, understood like this, is contrasted with meditation, in which the praying soul entertains images and concepts, drawn from the Gospels, for instance, in order to stir up feelings of love of God in prayer. But meditation has to cede to contemplation in which any particular images, even of Christ and his Passion (cf. *Cloud*, ch. 8) are buried beneath a 'cloude of forzetyng'.<sup>8</sup> What we find in the *Cloud* is a commendation of prayer as affective contemplation, produced in the soul by God's direct action: in the late Middle Ages, such an approach to prayer became widespread, and reached its culmination in the understanding of prayer found in the Carmelite saints of the Reformation era, St Teresa of Ávila, and St John of the Cross.

In fourteenth-century England the *Cloud* treatises were not alone. Earlier than these we find the writings of Richard Rolle of Hampole (who probably perished in the Black Death); contemporary with, or a little later than, these are the treatises of Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich. Some of these treatises became widely known (though not necessarily well known) in the later Middle Ages; the *Cloud* was translated into Latin as *Nubes Ignorandi*,<sup>9</sup> and presumably circulated abroad, some of Hilton's works were written in Latin, as were some of Rolle's.<sup>10</sup> But little more than a century after this flowering of 'mysticism', England was plunged into the Reformation, and these treatises (and some

others from the fifteenth century) were lost from view; the move towards the canonization of Richard Rolle ground to a halt, though the texts for his office had already been composed.<sup>11</sup>

'Lost from view': in reality the truth is even more striking—these writings were concealed from the public gaze; they became the preserve of the English Catholic, recusant communities that took refuge on the continent, mostly in France, and, for our story, particularly in Cambrai, just across the Channel from England in Picardy. These writings became precious relics of the lost world of Catholic England. The heart of the Catholic presence in Cambrai was a convent of Benedictine nuns, founded by the great-great-granddaughter of St Thomas More, Helen More (in religion, Dame Gertrude). Here the mystical texts of late medieval England were preserved and copied, and eventually, but only very slowly, published in printed form: *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian was published in 1670, Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* a little earlier in 1659; *Cloud of Unknowing* not until 1874. That is probably not by chance: these were, as we have suggested, precious texts, links with Catholic England. Circulating in hand-written copies, they would have only been available to a small circle of those deemed worthy to read them; the readership of printed texts is much more difficult to control. The striking lateness of the publication of the *Cloud of Unknowing* may have further significance, for this was at the very heart of a kind of Dionysian contemplative spirituality, cherished by the nuns of Cambrai.

In 1624, a Benedictine monk—strictly speaking Welsh, not English, as he had been born in Abergavenny—arrived at Cambrai, via Douai. In the rest of the life allotted to him—not twenty years—he developed his teaching based on the *Cloud of Unknowing*. His voluminous writings have only recently been published, owing to the herculean labours of an Anglican priest, Fr John Clark;<sup>12</sup> before that Baker was known through a kind of anthology, 'drawn from forty treatises', called *Sancta Sophia* (in later editions, *Holy Wisdom*), compiled and published in 1657 by his fellow Benedictine, Fr Serenus Cressy, who went on to publish Julian of Norwich and Walter Hilton. By this time Baker's contemplative spirituality was becoming suspect, caught up in the controversy over 'quietism'. Central to Baker's own writings is a work called *Secretum sive Mysticum*, the bulk of which is a somewhat garrulous commentary on the *Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>13</sup> For at the heart of Dom Augustine Baker's affective contemplative spirituality was the *Cloud* family of treatises. It weathered with difficulty the quietist controversy, which lasted from the seventeenth into the eighteenth century. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, by which time the *Cloud* had been published, the tide had turned; there was what one could well call a 'mystical revival', in which Dionysius was again to flourish, and with him Dom Augustine Baker: his teaching was endorsed by Dom Cuthbert Butler, abbot of Downside at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> That, however, takes us to the final section of this chapter.

Before we get there, we explore another strand in the English reception of the Areopagite: his reception in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (not into the eighteenth century, when the intellectual climate would likely not have been propitious to Dionysius). This strand will be very selective, led by the vagaries of this author's reading. Dionysius remained a figure in the intellectual constellation of theology after the



Reformation, along with the Church Fathers (amongst whom Dionysius was included, though doubts were growing) and later thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas. Dionysius was fairly readily accessible: there were several printed editions, in whole or in part, during the sixteenth century (our impression is that Denys the Carthusian's edition and commentary were often used). These editions were superseded in 1634 by Balthasar Corderius' edition, several times reprinted, eventually the text chosen by Migne for the *Patrologia Graeca* (1857).

Dionysius is cited by Richard Hooker in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. So far as we can ascertain, he is referred to only once, but the way he enters the discussion is instructive. He is invoked in the discussion of the 'second eternal law' in book I (the 'first eternal law' is God's own will, the second being the law of nature, the law of reason). Wondering at the 'dexterity and skill' of nature, Hooker remarks, 'it cannot be, but nature has some director of infinite knowledge to guide her in all her ways. Who the guide of nature, but only the God of nature? *In him we live, and move, and are*'<sup>15</sup>—quoting from the Apostle Paul's speech on the Areopagos, to an audience that included Dionysius. Very soon, in the same chapter, maybe because this quotation has called him to mind, Hooker goes on to quote from the Areopagite itself: from Dionysius' seventh letter, to Polycarp, in which he responds to the sophist Apollonphanes' railing against him as a parricide, because of his indebtedness to, and rejection of, Greek wisdom<sup>16</sup>—to the passage in which he reminds Apollonphanes of their experience at Heliopolis at the time of the crucifixion, when nature turned back on itself. But that is it. Hooker goes on to talk about the eternal law the angels observe, where one might well have expected some reference to the Areopagite, but there is nothing. Elsewhere there are allusions to Dionysius, but they seem slight.<sup>17</sup> So Hooker knows of the Areopagite and seems to accept his authenticity, but makes very little of him. In the next century, we find much the same picture in John Pearson: in his *On the Creed*,<sup>18</sup> he refers to Dionysius a few times, but not over important matters: he is cited in the notes over care for the bodies of the departed (II. 191), the meaning of the title παντοκράτωρ (II. 242–243), and the impossibility of God's denying himself (II. 244).

After such a disappointing trawl, it is surprising, perhaps, to find that if we look in somewhat less likely circles, we find much more promising material (in what follows largely inspired by Martin 2014). Let us begin with the Elizabethan scientist and philosopher (or Elizabethan magus), John Dee. According to Martin, 'Dee seems to have had only a passing interest in medieval theology, but a serious one in medieval mysticism', and goes on to tell us that Dee had filled his own copy of the Areopagite's *Opera*, an edition including the commentary of Denys the Carthusian, with marginalia: evidence of considerable interest.<sup>19</sup> It seems, not surprisingly perhaps, to have been Dionysius' doctrine of the divine names that attracted Dee in particular, where Dionysius speaks of 'the wonderful "name which is above every name"'.<sup>20</sup>

Of still more interest is the knowledge of Dionysius that we find in the poet and priest John Donne. In his early *Essays in Divinity*, he refers to Dionysius as a 'devout speculative man', and goes on to demonstrate his awareness (though not, at this time, endorsement) of his doctrine of apophatic and kataphatic theology.<sup>21</sup> A little later in the *Essays*,

he speaks of 'Meta-theology, and super-divinity': the inclusion of the latter must recall Dionysius. Donne was clearly interested in negative theology, though, to judge from the passages cited by Martin, he belongs firmly in the psychological-interpretation camp:<sup>22</sup> the darkness is not so much an ontological or epistemological darkness; it is rather a personal, psychological darkness of anguish and affliction (for which Martin finds support in Donne's *Devotions*). Direct citations of Dionysius seem not too common. However, in the sermon he gave in 1627 on Trinity Sunday, he makes rather more use of Dionysius. In this sermon, delivered at St Dunstan's, we find Donne speaking like this:

For the Trinity it self, it is *Lux*, but *Lux inaccessibilis*. . . God hath made darknesse his secret place; God, as God, will be seen in the creature; There, in the creature he is light; light accessible to our reason; but God, in the Trinity, is open to no other light, then the light of faith. To make representations of men, or of other creatures, we find two wayes; Statuaries have one way, and Painters have another: Statuaries doe it by Substraction; They take away, they pare off some parts of that stone, or that timber, which they work upon, and then that which they leave, becomes like that man, whom they would represent: Painters doe it by Addition; Whereas the cloth, or table presented nothing before, they adde colours, and lights, and shadowes, and so there arises a representation. Sometimes we represent God by Substraction, by Negation, by saying, God is that, which is not mortall, not passible, not moveable: Sometimes we present him by Addition; by adding our bodily lineaments to him, and saying, that God hath hands, and feet, and eares, and eyes; and adding our affections, and passions to him, and saying, that God is glad, or sorry, angry, or reconciled, as we are. Some such things may be done towards the representing of God, as God; But towards the expressing of the distinction of the Persons in the Trinity, nothing.<sup>23</sup>

Donne could not have written that passage without some quite close knowledge of Dionysius: the image of the sculptor recalls *Mystical Theology* 2, and the notion that there is a theology of denial that transcends affirmative and negative theology expresses a Dionysian intuition, though rarely put quite like that.<sup>24</sup> The way it is applied to the Trinity seems quite foreign to Dionysius, for whom God is equally unknowable as *μὴνός* and *τρίάς* (see DN 13. 3); the distinction, however, between God and Trinity, the one knowable and the other unknowable, is reminiscent of Eckhart, though with him it is reversed: the Godhead being unknowable and the Trinity knowable (though we cannot see how Donne can have known Eckhart).

Surely the most famous evocation, or rather quotation, of Dionysius in English literature is found in the stanza from Henry Vaughan's 'The Night':

There is in God (some say)  
A deep, but dazling darkness; As men here  
Say it is late and dusky, because they  
See not all clear;  
O for that night! where I in him  
Might live invisible and dim.<sup>25</sup>

L. C. Martin refers in his note to Dionysius, Ep. 5, which contains an explanation of the ‘divine darkness’ (θεῖος γνόφος), which is, we are told, ‘the unapproachable light, where God is said to dwell, invisible through his transcendent radiance and the same unapproachable through the dazzling shedding of light beyond being’ (καὶ ἀοράτῳ γε ὄντι διὰ τὴν ὑπερέχουσιν φανότητα καὶ ἀπροσίτῳ τῷ αὐτῷ δι’ ὑπερβολὴν ὑπερουσίου φωτοχυσίας).<sup>26</sup> Another possible source could be the ὑπέρφωτος... γνόφος of MT 1.1.

Another poet who makes use of the image of darkness in a way that recalls Dionysius is Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, George Herbert’s elder brother. His ‘Sonnet of Black Beauty’ begins:

Black beauty, which above that common light,  
Whose Power can no colours here renew  
But those which darkness can again subdue,  
Dost still remain unvary’d to the sight, ...

Ending with these lines:

Thou still abidest so intirely one,  
That we may know thy blackness is a spark  
Of light inaccessible, and alone  
Our darkness which can make us think it dark.<sup>27</sup>

It is reminiscent of Dionysius, but not so clearly derived from the Areopagite as Henry Vaughan’s stanza is.

It does not seem that anywhere else in Henry Vaughan is this Dionysian imagery used (an impression confirmed by the new edition of Vaughan’s works),<sup>28</sup> but it is not difficult to find use of Dionysius in his brother, Thomas. There are several references in his *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, ‘a discourse on the nature of man and his fate after death’, published in 1650. Dionysius is first introduced towards the beginning, after quoting a poem, the last couplet of which is virtually identical with the last couplet of his brother’s ‘The Nativity’ from *Thalia Rediviva*,<sup>29</sup> in commenting on which Thomas quotes from Iamblichus. He says of Dionysius:

*Dyonisius the Areopagite*, who lived in the Primitive Times, and received the Mysteries of Divinity immediately from the Apostles, stiles God the Father, sometimes *Arcanum Divinitatis*, sometimes *Occultum illud supersubstantiale* and elsewhere he compares him to a *Roote*, whose *Flowres* are the *Second* and *Third Person*.<sup>30</sup>

The imagery mentioned occurs in *Divine Names* (DN 2. 7: 645C), and is generally agreed to be of Neoplatonic provenance.

Later on, Thomas Vaughan quotes from Dionysius’ Ep. 9: *duplicem esse theologorum traditionem, arcanam alteram, ac mysticam: alteram vero manifestam, et notioiorem*—‘the tradition of the theologians is double: the one secret and mystical, the other manifest

and better known'—and goes on to add a reference to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, that the mysteries of divinity are delivered *partim scriptis, partim non scriptis*—'partly in written form, partly unwritten' (not an exact quotation, but a paraphrase of EH 1. 4). In context, Vaughan is using Dionysius in support of his defence of an inner, hidden meaning of the text, something he goes on to say that Dionysius expounded in his *Celestial Hierarchy* and his lost *Symbolic Theology* (*Theologia significativa*, as Vaughan calls it), which was indeed concerned, or would have been concerned, with the inner meaning of symbols, to judge from Ep. 9, which is meant to supplement the *Symbolic Theology*. The inner meaning of the Scriptures is the subject of a secret, unwritten tradition, passed down by an oral tradition; this whole dimension of the faith has been lost, Thomas complains, for 'it hath been the Common error for all times to mistake *signum* for *signatum*, the *shel* for the *Kernel*'.<sup>31</sup> A little later on in this treatise, Dionysius is again invoked in support of Vaughan's contention that God is immanent in everything, for the preservation of this creation, and that God's different names indicate the different ways in which he performs this function (Vaughan's quotations are from DN 1 and CH 2). It is interesting that Vaughan goes on to comment on this figurative kind of speech about God that it is:

not only proper to Holy Writt, but the *Aegyptians* also (as *Plutarch* tells me) call'd *Isis*, or the most secret part of Nature, *Myrionymos*; and certainly that the same thing, should have a Thousand Names, is no newes to such as have studied the Philosophers Stone.<sup>32</sup>

There are a few other references to Dionysius in Thomas Vaughan's works. His treatise, *Anima Magica Abscondita Or A Discourse on the universall Spirit of Nature* (published in the same year as *Anthroposophia Theomagica*), has a scholia from d'Étapes on the frontispiece from Dionysius' *Divine Names*, to the effect that 'there is one universal mirror before which love stands and shapes his own image'.<sup>33</sup> In yet another work, published the next year, *Lumen de lumine, or A new Magicall Light discovered and Communicated to the world*, Dionysius is mentioned in connection with Vaughan's idea that the system of the world is a kind of chain that extends from what is 'beneath all *Apprehension*' ('a Horrible Inexpressible *Darknesse*', which is cold) and that which is 'above all *Apprehension*', or as he puts it a few lines later, 'above all *Degree of Intelligence*, ... a certaine *Infinite Inaccessible Fire or Light*', which Dionysius calls '*Caligo Divina*, because it is *Invisible*, and *Incomprehensible*'. Vaughan immediately goes on to say that the 'Jew styles it *אין Ein*, that is *Nihil* or *Nothing*'.<sup>34</sup> It is striking that Vaughan cites the Kabbalah directly after Dionysius, suggesting a parallel between the Kabbalah's *Ein Sof* and its *sefiroth* and Dionysius' *Divine Darkness* and its names and celestial beings: an attractive mix that lies at the basis of the esoteric mysticism beginning to emerge in Thomas Vaughan's day in the thought of such as Jakob Boehme. We could pursue all this further, in Boehme's English disciples such as John Pordage, Jane Lead, and later (and in a more sober garb) William Law, but that must be for another occasion. We now turn to discuss the third strand.

Before embarking on this third section, we touch on what may be the first discussion in English of Dionysius the Areopagite; it is by B. F. Westcott and was originally one of a series of essays, published in the *Contemporary Review*, on significant Greek thinkers—Plato, Aeschylus, Euripides, Origen—ending with an essay of Dionysius. The Dionysius essay was originally published in 1883; the whole series of five essays appeared with some others in *Religious Thought in the West* (1891). The essay on Dionysius is, as one would expect, well informed and generally seeks to be sympathetic to him, though he clearly finds him somewhat off-putting:

There is, indeed, very little in the writings to attract a reader. The sentences are cumbersome and involved; the words are frequently uncouth and barbarous. The same thought is continually restated with a wearisome iteration; and emphasis or distinctness is sought simply by an accumulation of details.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, Westcott maintains, if one perseveres one can find ‘a real earnestness of purpose and many great thoughts’, ‘noble signs of the wondrous flexibility of Greek’, and evidence that Dionysius was ‘not an unattentive student of Plato’s manner’.<sup>36</sup> Westcott begins by outlining Dionysius’ place in the intellectual history of the West, and then moves quickly to an account of the main themes, which are, on the one hand, hierarchy, understood primarily as entailing rank and subordination and on the other, unity: the goal of the whole cosmos. This unity, he rightly observes, is understood in terms that transcend the conceptual: he speaks of ‘a power in [the human] by which, through the help of Divine guidance, he may rise, not indeed to a *knowledge* of the Absolute, but to a *fellowship* with it’.<sup>37</sup> Westcott then expounds Dionysius into greater detail, invariably fair, if not always perceptive. He sees that the treatment of the divine names in the treatise of that name sees them ‘a glorious “hymn”’,<sup>38</sup> and expounds Dionysius’ conviction of the non-reality of evil with care. In his summing up, he grants that many might think that Dionysius is hardly Christian at all, but defends the Christian Platonism of one who was living through an age of transition. ‘The Mystery of the Incarnation contains the pledge of the believer’s union with the One, while the Resurrection vindicates the proper unity of his whole nature and the completeness of his whole nature and the completeness of his future hope’.<sup>39</sup> In the end, Westcott finds the fundamental fault in Dionysius is his individualism, a charge that has often been repeated since. Perhaps Westcott reaches this conclusion because he fails to see the way in which the notion of hierarchy presupposes a community in which its members find mutual support. The suspicion is aroused that his notion of *κοινωνία* as no more than fellowship (the usual rendering of *κοινωνία* in the *Book of Common Prayer*) glosses over its deeper sense as participation or communion.

Even as Westcott was writing, there were those in England, and further afield, deeply drawn to an understanding of the Christian life that reached beyond the rational, leading to some form of union with God, assimilation to the divine. This was a disparate—or multifaceted—phenomenon, which would probably dissolve under any very searching analysis. There was interest in the occult, with which one could associate the name of Helen Blavatsky, and attempts to investigate paranormal phenomena

by scientific means; the Society of Psychical Research was founded in 1882. Occult societies attracted considerable interest: the Society of the Golden Dawn numbered among its adherents W. B. Yeats, as well as Evelyn Underhill (of whom more later). W. R. Inge's Bampton Lectures of 1899 were published under the title of *Christian Mysticism* and proved extremely popular. About the same time, William James gave his Gifford Lectures, published under the title, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902); one of the varieties was mysticism, the subject of lectures XVI and XVII. Both these works evidence a certain philosophical interest in mysticism.

Focusing on Dionysius might seem to provide a central thread, though how true that is is not evident. It was, indeed, in this period that we find the first translations of Dionysius into English, unless we count Dean Colet's paraphrase of the *Hierarchies* (as into French: witness the fine translation of 1845 by Georges Darboy, later Archbishop of Paris, who perished shot in cold blood by the Commune in 1871): a complete translation by John Parker, in two volumes (1897, 1899; preceded by an earlier translation of the treatises on the *Hierarchies* alone in 1894), and the translation by C. E. Rolt of *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*, published in 1920. As Parker's translation was being completed, any final doubts about the pseudonymity of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* were dispelled: in 1895 two German scholars, H. Koch and J. Stiglmayr, independently published articles demonstrating, beyond a cavil, that the author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* was dependent on the Neoplatonism associated with Proclus, the fifth-century diadochos of Plato at the Academy in Athens. Far from being the convert and disciple of the Apostle Paul, he had to be placed in the late fifth century at the earliest. So, just as the intellectual atmosphere was becoming once again sympathetic to mysticism, proof positive emerged that Dionysius was to be regarded as an imposter. This led to the wild goose chase of last century's Dionysian scholars, as they tried to crack his pseudonym. That melancholy story doesn't concern us now, fortunately, but ambivalence about Dionysius meant that he didn't benefit, as he might have done, from a more favourable intellectual climate.

In England the mystical revival had several elements—not least a revival, or rather the establishment, of contemplative monasticism in the early years of the twentieth century among Anglicans, mostly women.<sup>40</sup> On the English scene, there were several thinkers and writers who exemplify this change of climate. The principal names are probably such as W. R. Inge, later Dean of St Paul's, representing the philosophers; Reginald Somerset Ward and Evelyn Underhill, representing those directly interested in the pursuit of prayer; and among Catholics, Cuthbert Butler, John Chapman, both Benedictine monks, indeed abbots, of Downside, and Baron von Hügel, in all of whom there is both a philosophical and spiritual interest; we should add, too, the translators, John Parker and C. E. Rolt, the English translators of Dionysius, and there were other translators, too, of other mystical writers, German, Italian, and French.

Our brief is the reception of Dionysius, which limits the field, and in that field we shall briefly discuss Dean W. R. Inge, a scholar with philosophical interests, John Parker, the first translator of Dionysius into English, and Evelyn Underhill, whose interest in Dionysius and the Dionysian tradition was pastoral and practical.



Parker is an interesting case. The first to translate the whole of Dionysius into English, he was a redoubtable defender of Dionysius' authenticity. His arguments are still interesting to read, as he draws his weapons from J. B. Lightfoot's defence of the so-called middle recension of the Ignatian correspondence: his arguments are clever, but perverse. His translation of Dionysius, though written, as was the norm at the time, into a deliberately antiquated English, seem to me reasonably accurate, if one can penetrate his curious language. Let us take an example, from the very end of the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*. Moses has attained the heights of the mountain:

and then he [Moses] is freed from them who are both seen and seeing, and enters into the gloom of the *Agnosia*; a gloom veritably mystic, within which he closes all perceptions of knowledge and enters into the altogether impalpable and unseen, being wholly of Him who is beyond all, and of none, neither himself nor other; and by inactivity of all knowledge, united in his better part to the altogether Unknown, and by knowing nothing, knowing above mind.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from the gothic atmosphere it breathes, there is nothing wrong with this translation: it is accurate and manages to render Dionysius' tortuous Greek into something intelligible. His commentary on the text is largely caught up in his conviction of the authenticity of his author. In some ways he seems to be a mirror image of much twentieth-century Dionysian scholarship, which contrariwise became obsessed with the fruitless task of identifying our author.

Dean Inge's *Christian Mysticism*, based on his Bampton Lectures delivered in 1899, caught the spirit of the age. Peter Anson remarked that:

The publication in 1899 of *Christian Mysticism*, whose author, the Reverend William R. Inge, was at that date a Fellow and Tutor of Hertford College, Oxford, may perhaps have been responsible for increasing an interest in the contemplative life among members of the Church of England.<sup>42</sup>

This seems quite unlikely, as there is nothing in the book that is in the least sympathetic to those, inspired by the contemplative life, who were forming contemplative religious communities in the first decade of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Inge's account of mysticism in his lectures is learned and wide-ranging. Like William James, he distinguished between different forms of mysticism; in his case, between a speculative mysticism based on Christian Platonism, what he called 'practical and devotional mysticism', and also nature mysticism. He has appendices on subjects such as the relationship between Christian mysticism and the Greek mysteries, the doctrine of deification, and the mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs. There are two chapters on Christian Platonism and mysticism: one on the East, the other on the West. A third of the chapter on the East is devoted to Dionysius; the first two-thirds takes the story up to Dionysius, mostly concerned with Philo and the Christian Platonists of Alexandria and shot through with references to Plotinus, to whom Inge devoted his Gifford Lectures, which became probably his best book.<sup>43</sup>



In the chapter on Platonism and the East, Inge begins by defending the 'affinity between Christianity and Platonism' that was 'very strongly felt',<sup>44</sup> in the early Christian period, going on to mention Justin Martyr and other apologists, finding Platonic echoes in Paul and John, before moving on to Philo, Clement, and Origen, and then, by way of the Syriac *Book of Hierotheus*, reaching Dionysius. Hierotheus, he explains, is a character from Dionysius' writings, and he finds in the *Book of Hierotheus* what he describes as 'the ancient religion of the Brahmins, masquerading in clothes borrowed from Jewish allegorists, half-Christian gnostics, Manichaeans, Platonizing Christians, and pagan Neoplatonists'.<sup>45</sup> This, he claims, is the system that Dionysius developed. Inge's account of Dionysian mysticism is mingled with disparaging remarks—about Dionysius' lack of originality; his intellectualism, the lack of any mystical experience. For Inge, what is central to the Dionysian vision is a negative theology. Occasionally, despite himself, Inge gets carried away by aspects of the Dionysian vision: in talking about passing beyond the particular and the limited, he says, 'All the world of thought and senses is melted into an ocean without waves and current'.<sup>46</sup> But his final verdict on Dionysius is damning: intellectual and abstract, subject to the 'mistake of asceticism',<sup>47</sup> in danger of pantheism (though he does not actually lay the charge).

With Evelyn Underhill we move into an entirely different register in the English reception of Dionysius. We need first to fill in her biographical background very briefly. To oversimplify, her works—and she wrote a lot—can be seen in relation to two big books, her *Mysticism*, first published in 1911, and *Worship*, first published twenty-five years later in 1936. Behind the first book, which was very popular, going through thirteen editions in less than thirty years, lies her progress from being brought up in London, the daughter of a barrister, studying at King's College, London, occasionally travelling abroad, and in her early thirties finding herself drawn towards Catholicism. Delaying conversion to Catholicism on her marriage (to another barrister), events overtook her and she found herself unable to embrace Catholicism after the issuing of the papal decree, *Lamentabili*, condemning modernism (1907). She drifted into a kind of religious limbo, neither Anglican nor Catholic, taking religious sustenance from attending Benediction, which satisfied her need for worship. Soon she found herself reading widely and deeply in the mystics, mystics of any stripe and hue—Catholic, Protestant (such as Boehme), Neoplatonic, Sufi, Indian. It would be not unfair to say that she was seeking roots in the mystical tradition by reading widely and dispensing with any institutional framework, very much as she found herself doing in her life at that time. Out of this came her huge book, *Mysticism*. Dionysius figures significantly in this book, an example of the kind of universalist mysticism her book inevitably expounds. The structure of her mysticism could be called Carmelite, *sanjuanist*: it is about progress from meditation to contemplation, and within contemplation the passage through the dark night of the soul and the spirit to union. But it is illustrated by quotations drawn from a huge variety of 'mystics'. Dionysius is one of the witnesses:

'We must,' says Dionysius the Areopagite, 'be transported wholly out of ourselves and given unto God.' This is the 'passive union' of Contemplation: a temporary condition

in which the subject receives a double conviction of ineffable happiness and ultimate reality.<sup>48</sup>

A few lines later there is a quotation from Plotinus, then from Ruysbroek ('who continued in the mediaeval world the best traditions of Neoplatonic mysticism'), then comes Walter Hilton, Plotinus again, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and so on. She pauses in her account of 'Introversion: Contemplation' to say:

Many other mystics have written to the same effect: have described with splendour the ineffable joys and terrors of the Abyss of Being 'where man existed in God from all Eternity,' the soul's adventures when, 'stripped of its very life,' it 'sails the wild billows of the sea divine.' But their words merely amaze the outsider and give him little information. The contemplative self who has attained this strange country can only tell an astonished and incredulous world that here his greatest deprivation is also his greatest joy; that here the extremes of possession and surrender are the same, that ignorance and knowledge, light and dark, are *One*. Love has led him into that timeless, spaceless world of Being which is the peaceful ground, not only of the individual striving spirit, but also of the striving universe; and he can but cry with Philip, '*It is enough*'.<sup>49</sup>

*Mysticism* is about the individual's quest for God. Though Underhill does quote from non-Christian sources, she relies for the most part on Christian, indeed Catholic, spiritual writers, but the Christianity is aetiolated; there is no place for the Church as an institution, nor for the sacraments. It mirrors Underhill's own spiritual situation at the time, unable to reconcile herself with any ecclesial state.

In the year *Mysticism* was published (1911), she met and came under the influence of Baron von Hügel. It took ten years for her formally to accept von Hügel as her spiritual director, and part of the reason for that was that he required her to become a church member. She returned to the Church of her birth and became a communicant member of the Church of England. She then embarked on a period in which she was much sought after as a spiritual director herself, and especially as a retreat conductor. The retreat house at Pleshey in Essex became especially associated with her. It is out of this more settled ecclesial period of her life that her book, *Worship*, came into being. This book could not be more different from her earlier *Mysticism*, though the lines of continuity are easily discernible. *Worship* is based on the awe the finite creature must feel before the infinite mystery of God: this is where she starts. One feels oneself in the company of scholars such as Rudolf Otto and Friedrich Heiler, both friends of hers, whose books (earlier books, in the case of Heiler) inhabit the same sort of world as *Mysticism*. But she does not continue by exploring the path the creature has to follow to come to God (though she does not neglect the personal dimension of worship); she moves on to discuss ritual and symbol, sacrament and sacrifice, the theological basis of Christian worship in the Trinity and the Incarnation and the Cross, the sanctification of time in the liturgical year, the sanctification of life, and the worship of the community, the Body of Christ. There are two central chapters on the Eucharist, and another key chapter on

personal worship and prayer. Part II is more historical and phenomenological, looking first at Jewish worship, both Temple and Synagogue, at the beginnings of Christian worship, and then surveys, with enormous appreciation and sensitivity, the different traditions of Christian worship: Catholic and Orthodox (or as she has it, Catholic worship: Western and Eastern), the Reformed tradition, the Free Churches (including the Quakers) and the Anglican tradition. So far as I can tell, Dionysius is not mentioned in this book, and yet it seems to me that in her appreciation of the nature of Christian worship, she is much closer in spirit to Dionysius, always conscious of the place of the Liturgy, than in *Mysticism*, for all the explicit citation of the Areopagite we find there.

There is another aspect to Evelyn Underhill. As well as a multitude of shorter works, she made editions of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. These were editions both scholarly and popular: she based them on medieval manuscripts, but modernized the spelling (though not otherwise changing the English very much) so that they could be used for the purpose for which they were written: to help people in their life of prayer. *The Cloud*, as we have seen, is thoroughly Dionysian in inspiration (though there is more to Dionysius than the Dionysius we find in the *Cloud* treatises); Hilton's dependence on Dionysius, though real, is mixed with other influences. These were, however, the works on which Dom Augustine Baker drew in his endeavours to teach the nuns of Cambrai about prayer. It seems to me that Evelyn Underhill could well be regarded as a disciple—across the centuries—of Baker, as a Dionysian contemplative as he conceived it, but one who, exceptionally, came to appreciate the corporate, sacramental dimension of the Dionysian vision, though maybe unaware that this is as much a part of the Dionysian vision as his 'mysticism'.

## NOTES

1. Hodgson 1958: 2–10.
2. Hodgson 1958: 2, ll. 25–7.
3. Hodgson, 1958: 3, ll. 16–18.
4. Louth 1976.
5. Hodgson 1944: 26, ll. 1–5.
6. Hodgson 1944: 26, l. 10.
7. Hodgson 1944: 26, ll. 10–12.
8. Hodgson 1944: *Cloud*, 29, l. 18.
9. Clark 1989.
10. See Clark-Taylor 1987.
11. Allen 1931: xii.
12. Clark 1997 ff.
13. Clark 1997.
14. Butler 1927: xxxv–vii.
15. I. 3. 4: McGrade 2013: I. 50.
16. *Epistles* (henceforth Ep). 7. 2: 1081AB.
17. V. 37. 2, V. 78. 4: McGrade II. 100, 295.
18. Pearson 1847.

19. Martin 2014: 25.
20. Dionysius, DN 1. 6: PG 3: 596A; quoted Martin 2014: 33.
21. Simpson 1952, 21.
22. See Turner 1995.
23. Simpson-Potter 1953–62: VIII, 54.
24. But see MT 1. 2: 1000B.
25. Martin 1957: 523.
26. Martin 1957: 750.
27. Moore Smith 1923: 38.
28. Dickson-Rudrum-Wilcher 2018.
29. Rudrum 1984: 600; for the poem see Martin 1957: 666.
30. Rudrum 1984: 56.
31. Rudrum 1984: 74–75.
32. Rudrum 1984: 88–89.
33. Rudrum 1984: 97.
34. Rudrum 1984: 328–329.
35. Westcott 1891: 144.
36. Westcott 1891: 144.
37. Westcott 1891: 159.
38. Westcott 1891: 177.
39. Westcott 1891: 189.
40. Anson 1955.
41. Parker 1897: 132.
42. Anson 1955: 497.
43. Inge 1918.
44. Inge 1913: 77.
45. Inge 1913: 104.
46. Inge 1913: 113.
47. Inge 1913: 117.
48. Underhill 1940: 333.
49. Underhill 1940: 339.

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## CHAPTER 35

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# HUGO KOCH AND JOSEF STIGLMAYR ON DIONYSIUS AND PROCLUS

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CHRISTIAN SCHÄFER

## THE DIONYSIAN QUESTION AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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It is commonly accepted that modern Dionysius studies began in 1895 when Josef Stiglmayr (1851–1934) and Hugo Koch (1869–1940) published their respective papers on the dependency of the Dionysian treatise *On the Divine Names* on Proclus' work *De malorum subsistentia*.<sup>1</sup> Koch's paper was published in the classics journal *Philologus*, while Stiglmayr's work appeared in the historiographical periodical *Historisches Jahrbuch*. The temporal coincidence of the publication date of both studies is striking (the editors of *Philologus* felt compelled to add a footnote explaining that Koch's article had been submitted and accepted before the publication of the 'very akin study' by Stiglmayr).<sup>2</sup> The coincidence, however, is explainable. Several prior publications had already hinted at, or, in fact, forcefully asserted the possibility of Dionysius' reliance on Proclus,<sup>3</sup> thereby prompting Koch and Stiglmayr to take the hint and have a closer look at Proclus' writing on the subsistence of evil. In the same year (1895), Stiglmayr published a second study on Dionysius, a ninety-three page work titled *The Appearance of the pseudo-Dionysian Writings and Their Penetration into Christian Literature until the Lateran Council of 649* and released in an out-of-the-way fashion in the yearbook of the Jesuit grammar school at Feldkirch (Austria),<sup>4</sup> where Stiglmayr had been working as a classical languages teacher at the time. In this detailed and learned contribution, Stiglmayr acknowledges his debt to preceding scholarly work on the Dionysian problem and on the provenance of Dionysius' doctrine from Athenian Neoplatonism. Most notably, he refers to the second volume of August Friedrich Gfrörer's monumental

*Universal Church History*. As early as 1842, Gfrörer had conjectured that the author of the Dionysian Corpus was a Christian convert of Proclus' Neoplatonic school at Athens<sup>5</sup>: 'The false Dionysius was indubitably a pupil of the Neoplatonist Proclus, he has most probably studied in Athens and this is where he assimilated most of his philosophical wisdom.'<sup>6</sup> Gfrörer's explanations were formulated in rather general terms, but in some way or another, they anticipated some of the main reasons that Stiglmayr states and demonstrates meticulously in his 1895 study on Dionysius and Proclus. Similarly, Hugo Koch highlighted his debt to the work of Johann Georg Veit Engelhardt, who, as early as in 1823, had suggested Dionysius' dependency on the Proclean system, indicating cross references to Proclus' *Elements of Theology*.<sup>7</sup>

Koch and Stiglmayr pursued their endeavours from slightly different angles. Koch chose a more philological approach that included a more obvious interest in reconstructing Proclus' original wording. As a matter of fact, the Greek original of Proclus' treatise *On the Subsistence of Evils* is lost today, but in 1280, William of Moerbeke had composed a translation of it, which aided Stiglmayr and Koch in their comparative studies on Dionysius' treatise and Proclus. This is because Moerbeke's translation makes the best effort to reproduce the Greek wording and mode of expression, sometimes even at the cost of rendering the Latin outcome close to inscrutable. There is a version, or rather, a 'reproduction' of portions of the Proclean text in Greek, stemming from the eleventh century and confected by Isaac Sebastokrator, which Koch and Stiglmayr consulted for their studies, though they acknowledged that it is deceptive;<sup>8</sup> in the twentieth and twenty-first century, there have been attempts to render a retroversion of the Proclean text based on Moerbeke's translation, Isaac Sebastokrator's writing, and testimonies from Byzantine writers, the most recent being Benedikt Strobel's retroversion of Proclus' *Tria opuscula*.

Stiglmayr was a theologian specializing in the patristic era and the history of dogma in the East, and shows a predominantly doctrinal interest in analysing the texts of Proclus and Dionysius. As his later works show, one of his primordial aims was to reassess the role of the Dionysian writings and their author for the study of Church history and the theological debates of the patristic era.

These different interests and perspectives concerning the Dionysian question might also explain the conspicuous fact that Stiglmayr and Koch did not make extensive use of each other's work in their own writings. With no reason to criticize the other's nearly identical conclusions concerning Dionysius's 'plagiarism' of Proclus' writings, their diverging academic interests led to a complaisant acknowledgement of the other's achievements, but only rarely does one of the two scholars mention the other's theses or further speculations.<sup>9</sup>

It was precisely the difficulty of the intricately transmitted text of the Proclean treatise that had hampered an earlier identification of Dionysius as relying on Proclus. Throughout the nineteenth century, there had been a strong scholarly tendency, if not an extensive consensus, pointing at the striking similarities between Dionysius's theo-ontology and the pagan Neoplatonist's philosophical doctrines, and suggesting a composition date for the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (CD) not earlier than the teachings of



Ammonius Sakkas (third century AD). Those voices advocating a provenance from apostolic times for the writings of the Dionysian Corpus had been outnumbered as the end of the century approached, though they still existed. In an attempt to reconcile the face value of Dionysius' Platonism with his alleged claim of direct apostolic discipleship, an old assumption from patristic literature was revitalized: namely, that the teachings reproduced by the pagan Neoplatonists were a sort of *thesaurus doctrinae* already existing in apostolic times but withheld from the general public, and that Dionysius was one of the early Christians—in fact, the Areopagite of the *Acts of the Apostles*, as the case may be—who knew of these teachings and had seen their potential for the elucidation of Christian truths. In this case, the pagan Neoplatonists might even have been the copyists of Dionysius' philosophy, not vice versa. Stiglmayr reconstructs this theory from its beginnings in the earliest scholia to the Dionysian writings (the 'Scholia diligentissimi cuiusdam viri' in PG 4, 21D) and refutes it.<sup>10</sup>

## THE RESULT OF KOCH'S AND STIGLMAYR'S STUDIES

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The upshot of Koch's and Stiglmayr's very careful and detailed studies was that the second portion of Dionysius' treatise *De divinis nominibus*, chapter 4 (PG 3, 713D–736B; henceforward DN IV/2), dealing with the problem of evil, was dependent on Proclus' treatise *On the Subsistence of Evils*, almost verbatim or close to verbatim at that, though it is not a complete copy. Not that this doctrinal piece was in any way conspicuously erratic in the inner development of the Dionysian treatise; it appears in the chapter on the theonym 'the Good' and is introduced rather organically in the overall ductus of the reasoning on this divine name. The author assumes the role of a reader or hearer who, confronted with the doctrine of the Good, the Beautiful, Light, and Love as generative and regulative principles of creation, quite naturally seems to have a problem in reconciling this doctrine with the existence of evil(s) in the world. For given that the Good is the origin of all:

[s]omeone may make this observation: [ . . . ] granted that the Beautiful and Good is all this, how is it that the multitude of demons has no wish for it and indeed is inclined to the material and is lapsed from the angelic condition of longing for the Good? [...] What in fact is evil? Where did it come from? (PG 3, 713D–716A; trans. Luibheid/Rorem 1987).

But the wording and the inner arrangement of Dionysius' argumentation betrayed his debt to Proclus, which was exactly what Stiglmayr's and Koch's studies showed conclusively. For once the approach via the treatise *De malorum subsistentia* was found, both scholars, albeit with their different interest in the Dionysian question, 'independently arrived at the same conclusion through the same method' (Stiglmayr 1911, 15). Dionysius presupposes both the Proclean doctrine of evil as *parhypostasis* and the logical

background which his theory of evil relies on in order to show that evil has no proper place within the ontological graduation of reality.<sup>11</sup> Both articles give exhaustive facing-page comparisons of the Proclean and Dionysian text material in question.<sup>12</sup> This deduction was backed up by further investigation (by Stiglmayr and others), which proved that Dionysius' writings showed concern with problems and discussions of the era of the Council of Chalcedon and the Antiochean liturgy of the fifth century.<sup>13</sup>

As to the particular results that Koch and Stiglmayr extracted from their comparisons of the writings, a few examples must suffice:

- The introductory part of the problem of evil in DN IV/2 (the entire two sub chapters 18 and 19, from PG 3, 713D–717B) seems to have furnished one of the clues for Koch's discovery of Dionysius' connection with *De malorum subsistentia*. Koch states that it is precisely in this passage 'that Dionysius' dependency on Proclus comes forward in a manifest way. The explanation given by Proclus is much more circumstantial and consequential than Dionysius', whose sentences appear like short extracts or summaries' of the corresponding parts in Proclus's treatise.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Proclus constructs his text in alignment with quotes from Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus*, and Plotinus' *Ennead* I 8, which he takes as a starting point and provocation for his own development of the problem of evil, while Dionysius presents the mere sequence of Proclean thoughts and omits the quotes, as if providing answers without asking questions or raising problems. Similarly, Stiglmayr comments on how Proclus lays open his '*principium speculationis*', which Dionysius replaces with a rhetorical aperçu, and whose absence is the cause (actually, the *causa deficiens*) of many grammatical leaps and filler words in Dionysius's introduction to the problem of evil.<sup>15</sup>
- In one of the most detailed parts of his study, Stiglmayr takes great pains to show how and why Dionysius, in explaining the theory of evil as 'corruption of the good', has to explain belatedly concepts and ideas that in Proclus' writing have their proper place in the explanation of the '*principium speculationis*'. Dionysius copies them from Proclus, but, much to their disadvantage, shortens them and then puts them in a new context where they seem misplaced.<sup>16</sup>
- Similarly, the demonology and angelology in DN IV/2 is an adoption of the corresponding passage in Proclus' treatise. But it is recast and rephrased in order to fit the Christian perception of daemons and angels, which leads to cracks and ruptures in Dionysius' rendering of the Proclean system of the spirit world. A conspicuous example is Dionysius' adjustments of the Proclean demonology to the idea that daemons are 'fallen angels', which calls for an accessory elucidation: They cannot be considered evil 'by nature', but they can be called evil, not according to what they are (which would be the nature part), but according to what they are not.<sup>17</sup> Speaking of the same problem, Stiglmayr adds that Proclus' theory falls back on Plato's *Theaetetus* (176e), a feature which explains much of Proclus' account of the problem, but disappears almost completely in Dionysius.<sup>18</sup>
- The discussion of evil (or rather, the lack of it) in the realm of the soul presents a similar case of a more elaborate Proclean theory remodelled by Dionysius, where

Proclus' extensive explanation of the initial (and essential) goodness of the soul falls back on Plato's psychology (Stiglmayr adduces the pertinent passages from the *Phaedrus*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Republic*). Dionysius abbreviates this explanation, eliminating noticeably all allusions to the soul's pre-existence and incarnation.<sup>19</sup>

- A point of great importance is the discussion of matter and evil. Proclus apparently held that Plotinus had quite bluntly identified matter and evil (many modern interpreters would follow him in that). In *De malorum subsistentia*, Proclus argues against any attempt to identify matter and evil, thus taking a stance in an old Neoplatonic school controversy. Actually, the problem of matter was arguably the prime problem, if not the motive, for Proclus' discussion of evil. Dionysius follows Proclus in his argumentation and has good reason to do so from a Christian point of view. Yet, Dionysius's presentation of the problem, though following Proclus' discussion lacks the 'Sitz im Leben' that this very doctrinal piece had in Proclus' treatise on the subsistence of evil.<sup>20</sup>

In recognizing yet another evidential proof for Dionysius's plagiarism in this instance, Stiglmayr comments:

Dionysius did not incorporate [ ... ] the cogent point that Proclus develops in his prolific and accurate argumentation; [ ... ] he rather hastens to the conclusion of the thought in order to secure the results of the foreign deduction. Naturally, many things get distorted, twisted and creased during this procedure; instead of the delicate organic structure of the original, we are left with random fragments of it.<sup>21</sup>

Altogether, Koch's and Stiglmayr's comparative studies of the correspondence between Proclus' treatise and DN IV/2 yielded the following conclusions:

- (1) Dionysius copied Proclus' text, and not vice versa, because the interest in the specific issue of evil's *parhypostasis* and the motivation for the ontological discussion of evil in this specific fashion and wording corresponds more genuinely with Proclus' doctrinal interests, his starting point, and above all with his critique of Plotinus' alleged theory of matter as a source of evil and, most probably, the defence of Syrianus' theses on evil. In DN IV/2, these Proclean interests in the doctrinal controversies of the fifth century and the Athenian school's stance with respect to the specific controversy on evil clearly shine through.<sup>22</sup> Koch goes into further detail, showing that Proclus in *De malorum subsistentia* develops a 'characteristically distinct notion' of evil as *sterêsis* that differs from all other Neoplatonic theories, and that it is precisely this notion that we find in Dionysius' treatise. What is more, Proclus carefully introduces and then explains and legitimates the use of the concept of *parhypostasis*, whereas Dionysius' text shows that he merely adopts it by using it without any safeguard.<sup>23</sup>
- (2) For the same reason, there is no need to presuppose a third source common to both Proclus and DN IV/2, which could explain away the Dionysian treatise's dependency on the Proclean text.<sup>24</sup> Rather, looking at the writings of Proclus

and Dionysius, the conspectus of ‘coincidences and differences makes it clear, that Proclus is the original, whereas Dionysius is clearly the dependent part’.<sup>25</sup> Stiglmayr and Koch agree that Proclus gives the full picture, while Dionysius differs from Proclus in almost nothing, but his work shows extensive missing parts and logical lacunae that can easily be filled with the material from *De malorum subsistentia*.

- (3) On that basis, there is no reason or stylistic indication to render it plausible that DN IV/2 was a posterior addition or insertion to the Dionysian treatise, confected by a later plagiarist of Proclus’ text and introduced in the original writings of the Areopagite Dionysius from the first century.<sup>26</sup> This latter point is interesting. It did not escape the attention of Koch and Stiglmayr that DN IV/2 was certainly different in style and wording from the rest of the treatise on the divine names. Actually, their studies relied on the noticeable stylistic peculiarity of the entire passage on evil. But how could it then be maintained beyond doubt that it was not a posterior insertion, precisely because of this stylistic peculiarity? Koch and Stiglmayr deemed it enough, it seems, to point to the logically befitting treatment of evil in the treatise, insisting (and rightly so) that it was an integral part of the overall development of the chapter and a necessary complement of its discussion of the good. This justified the conclusion that DN IV/2 was not an alien insertion. But the problem remained, for the moment. It was only much later taken up and treated more thoroughly by Piero Scazzoso, who raised the question of the stylistic characteristics of DN IV/2 anew, and Eugenio Corsini, who showed that the conspicuous ‘proclism’ of Dionysius’ writings is neither limited to the treatment of evil in the treatise *On the Divine Names*, nor, for that matter, to only this treatise of the *CD*.<sup>27</sup>

The success of Koch’s and Stiglmayr’s studies was virtually immediate, and it silenced the voices that, up till then, had defended and maintained the idea of the immediate apostolic discipleship of the author of the Dionysian Corpus.<sup>28</sup> In 1911, a perfectly satisfied Josef Stiglmayr could summarize retrospectively:

The most expert specialists, Bardenhewer, Funk, Ehrhard, Diekamp, Rauschen, de Smedt S. J., Duchesne, Batiffol etc. and similarly the Protestant authorities on ancient Christian literature, Geizer, Harnack, Krüger, Bonwetsch, among others, endorsed the conclusions [i.e. of our studies]: ‘the records concerning this centuries-old matter of dispute finally could be filed away’, wrote Geizer.<sup>29</sup>

## A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE CONSEQUENCES

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Ever since 1895, ‘[t]he preponderance of scholars have worked in the wake of Koch, attempting to assess the nature and extent of the author’s debt to late Neoplatonism’.<sup>30</sup>

As a result of their studies on Dionysius' writings, Stiglmayr and Koch held that these writings were to be considered a 'lengthy plagiarism',<sup>31</sup> 'the poor abridgement of Proclus' work',<sup>32</sup> or the work of 'a forger, who had to befool his sources in order to not unmask himself', whereas 'Proclus is candid and honest and lays open his sources'.<sup>33</sup> Koch's and Stiglmayr's assessments were echoed by others, who opined that Dionysius' thought was a 'grotesque' rehashing and a 'ruthless usurpation of late Neoplatonic philosophy' by an 'unconsidered Christian falsifier',<sup>34</sup> and that Dionysius' capacity to follow Proclus' philosophy was poor and showed his intellectual mediocrity.<sup>35</sup> Stiglmayr, in particular, did not only propose an overall critique of Dionysius' works and intellectual capacities, he was also the first of many critical voices on the style of Dionysius' writings, commenting that Dionysius's mode of expression was 'aphoristic', full of 'unconcluded sentences', doltishly anticipating conclusions or jumping to them, a series of 'random rudiments' from the thoughts of Proclus, whose wording he 'mutilates', 'indulging in laboured phrases'.<sup>36</sup>

In this aspect as in many others, Dionysius shared the fate of many philosophers and theologians of the post-Hellenistic era of the East, since it is true that for a long time 'Byzantine philosophers, for the most part, have not been studied on their own merit, and their works have hardly been scrutinized as works of philosophy'.<sup>37</sup> But Dionysius is a special case, because his alleged lack of originality came with the charge of having been unduly valued by virtue of a pseudonymic pretention that was eventually unmasked, thanks to the philological detective work of Koch and Stiglmayr. There have been convincing attempts, however, to reassess the quality and originality of these Byzantine thinkers in recent scholarship, and Dionysius is no exception. In his case, this reassessment had to deal critically with Koch's and Stiglmayr's game-changing assessments and corresponding value judgements.

Thus the radically new tendency that Dionysius studies took after Koch and Stiglmayr has been subject to some harsh criticism, a prominent example of which is found in Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>38</sup> Von Balthasar complains that the attempts of interpreting the Dionysian writings in and since the works of Stiglmayr and Koch, are 'not only ill-founded, but also missing the point of the texts themselves and the role they have played in the Western tradition'.<sup>39</sup> In recent times, there has been an increasing number of critical reviews of the impact of Koch's and Stiglmayr's writings on Dionysius studies, leading to the amplification of the voices that called for a readjustment of the direction they had taken. Nestor Kavvadas, for one, has pointed to the fact that 'the academic discussions that Stiglmayr and Koch initiated, had all too long been under the spell of the problem of Dionysius' literary dependence on Proclus' and suspects that this has to be seen as a direct consequence of the 'ideological load' that comes with the solution of the Dionysian problem proposed by the two scholars. Kavvadas hints at Stiglmayr's and Koch's specific interest in the consequences that the disclosure of Dionysius' plagiarism had for Church history and the vexed question of the alleged 'Hellenization' of Christian doctrine, and calls for a rethinking in terms of a turn to a more philosophical perception dealing with the doctrinal substance, argumentative intention, and achievement of the respective texts by Proclus and Dionysius.<sup>40</sup> In a similar line of thought, others have

pleaded that a convincing explanation of the philosophical thinking developed in the treatise *On the Divine Names* can be rendered without subordinating Dionysius' writing to the aspect of its historical dependence on Proclus. The problem here is, according to these interpreters, that ever since Koch's and Stiglmayr's discovery, there has been a constant danger of the 'Pseudo-' eclipsing 'Dionysius' in the study of the 'Pseudo-Dionysian' writings. This tendency has its roots in assessments and qualifications made by both these scholars themselves, precisely because they did not only establish Dionysius' dependence on Proclus but also deduced a normative evaluation from it. As a result, from that very moment on, Dionysius' writings were almost exclusively considered a forgery, a fraud, or 'imitations', whose effects were 'not infrequently grotesque',<sup>41</sup> and their author was viewed as a mere copyist of Proclean philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Von Balthasar's is the standard complaint against the course that Dionysius studies took since Koch and Stiglmayr (instigated by their assessment of Dionysius' plagiarism):

With Denys [Dionysius] we have a unique case in theology, indeed in all intellectual history. A man of the foremost rank and of prodigious power hid his identity not only from centuries of credulity but also from the critical acumen of the modern period, and precisely through that concealment exercised his influence. That for our modern, and above all German, scholarly world is unforgiveable. After their tank-formations have laid waste his garden, there is for them not a blade of grass left: all that remains is PSEUDO-, written in bold letters, and underlined with many marks of contempt. Indeed, what is deemed relevant in the case of the Neoplatonists is with him unhinged and without any proper foundation, so that in the end he stands forth as a wretched mongrel: a corpse beneath the triumphal car of modern philology, by association with which his commentators, the greatest minds of declining antiquity, of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance and even of the baroque period, are casually discredited.<sup>43</sup>

Von Balthasar laments that in the aftermath of Koch and Stiglmayr, generations of Dionysian studies followed hypotheses which were 'signs of a certain spiritual 'colour blindness' which prevents them, for all their individual scholarship (which Stiglmayr, Pera, Honigmann and the rest doubtless have), from grasping the general flow of the Areopatic handwriting'.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the vein of interpretation criticized by von Balthasar and others, an increasing number of recent Dionysius scholars have tried to show that 'many important ideas of Dionysius' philosophy come to light precisely if, and sometimes only if, the author's pretension to be the converted Areopagite is—at least technically or in theory—admitted or assumed' and that it is rather by 'reading oneself into and familiarizing oneself with the author's standpoint, fictitious as it may be, and not by methodically bringing it under suspicion, that Dionysius can be adequately understood'.<sup>45</sup> Rather than telling parallels, conspicuous terminology, and eye-catching give-aways, the author's self-declared intention should provide the basis for interpretation, thus acknowledging that the philosophy of the *CD*, undisputedly Platonic as it is, displays a way of thinking and a metaphysical programme of its own, with its own basic idea and architecture, whether or not it is indebted in several (and even important)



aspects to Proclus. Challenging the line of interpretation that prevailed for an entire century following Koch's and Stiglmayr's assessment of Dionysius' philosophical (and theological) qualities, more and more scholars have, since the last decade of the twentieth century, maintained that Dionysius' writings can be read and understood as an impressive philosophical system that—admitting its Platonic origin and in full awareness of its Proclean background—requires no external support for its non-discriminatory comprehension and evaluation.<sup>46</sup> It might be interesting to observe how recent scholarship on the medieval interpreters of the *CD* has shown and offered alternative ways of an unbiased reading of Dionysius' thought without subduing it a priori to the perspective of apostolic discipleship or plagiarism.<sup>47</sup>

## THE QUEST FOR THE AUTHOR

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In the application of this perspective also the attempts to identify the historical author of the *CD* that were initiated or fomented by Stiglmayr's and Koch's studies have taken a back seat in the interpretations of many scholars, a great number of which consider it a futile endeavour to identify him or think of this endeavour as non-essential or even obstructive for a clearer understanding of Dionysius' thought. Again, von Balthasar can serve as a spokesman for many of these interpreters: 'one can only rejoice over the fact that he [Dionysius] succeeded in vanishing behind the Areopagite for a millennium, and that now afterwards, in the age of opening graves, he has been brought out, he stubbornly hides his face'.<sup>48</sup>

Hugo Koch refrained from participating in the guessing games as to who the historical author of the *CD* might have been and continued his criticism of the authorship of the *CD*, repeating and systemizing his previous conclusions, and speculating about whether the Neoplatonic language of the Dionysian writings was designed to render the texts more accessible and acceptable to pagan readers (or Christian readers with a markedly pagan background) familiar with the language of ancient mystery religion.<sup>49</sup> Already in his comparison of Proclus' demonology with Dionysius' in DN IV/2, Koch had taken special interest in the connections between this demonology and the one found in Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*.<sup>50</sup>

Stiglmayr's case is different, mainly due to his own interests in and view of the Dionysian problem. As mentioned earlier, Stiglmayr had acknowledged his debt to Gfrörer's *Church History* in the question of Dionysius' dependency on Proclean philosophy. He also followed Gfrörer in his concern with the problem of the historical identification of the author of the Dionysian Corpus. Gfrörer had submitted (not as the first scholar, but as the first one to link the problem directly and convincingly to the Athenian provenance of Dionysius' philosophy) that 'to all appearances, he [Dionysius] did not write his works in Athens, however, where a pagan Neoplatonism was taught, but in the East, within the boundaries of the patriarchy of Antioch, under the influence of the Monophysites of that region'.<sup>51</sup> Stiglmayr adopts this assumption



(‘evidence points to another place of publication of the Dionysian writings, first and foremost to Syria’), and complements it by conjecturing that ‘the extensive use made of the Bible and Patristic works makes it clear that a number of years had to pass between Dionysius’ conversion and his Christian writing’.<sup>52</sup> Following Gfrörer, Stiglmayr had therefore repeatedly insisted that ‘the provenance of the *CD* was late fifth-century Syria–Palestine—a conclusion that, with some refinement, still holds sway today’.<sup>53</sup> In 1928, Stiglmayr’s research on the Neoplatonic background of Dionysius’ thought led him to suggest a historical identification of the author of the *CD*. According to Stiglmayr, the author was in fact Severus, the ‘Monophysite’ Patriarch of Antioch (c. 465–538). Almost nothing of Severus’ written doctrine is extant (though Syriac versions of some of his writings by Athanasius of Nisibis have survived<sup>54</sup>); but of what is known of him, Stiglmayr deduced that Severus was the only Christian author (within the time-frame and geographical space established by the consensus of 1895) who had the intellectual capacity and philosophical expertise to produce an oeuvre of the quality of the Dionysian Corpus. What is more, in the extant texts of Severus, Stiglmayr identified three quotations from the *CD* and a number of terms and expressions shared by Dionysius and Severus, which (prematurely, considering that Severus was most probably an attentive reader of the Corpus) led him to affirm that with these similarities, Severus had ‘put his forgery on the table’.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the earliest reference to the Dionysian writings occurs in a report on a discussion between an orthodox group of followers of Hypathius of Ephesus and a group of Monophysite followers of Severus. In order to support their ‘Severian’ point of view, the spokesmen of the latter group adduce the writings of ‘Dionysius the Areopagite’, alleging that these buttressed the doctrine of Severus. Hypathius, of course, called in question the authenticity of these writings<sup>56</sup> (Stiglmayr had named Severus among the earliest testimonies for the Dionysian writings already in 1895, *inter alia* referring to the controversy between Hypathius and the Severians, but at that time, had stopped short of calling him the author of the Corpus<sup>57</sup>). Stiglmayr’s hypothesis concerning the authorship of Severus was shown to be practically untenable by Joseph Lebon as early as in 1930.<sup>58</sup> Stiglmayr made an attempt to save his hypothesis, but the text of his reply to Lebon betrays that Stiglmayr himself had practically accepted the defeat of his ‘brilliant if erroneous suggestion’<sup>59</sup> to this question.<sup>60</sup> Lebon’s immediate answer to Stiglmayr’s attempted ‘rehabilitation’ of Severus confirmed Stiglmayr’s defeat.<sup>61</sup>

Since Stiglmayr’s conjecture concerning Severus of Antioch, there has been a continual revision of candidates for the author of the Dionysian writings, but none of them prevailed. Over a century after the ground-breaking studies of 1895, the *status quaestionis* of the problem is still the one defined by Stiglmayr in the introduction to his German translation of the Dionysian treatise on the *Celestial Hierarchies*, before he opted for Severus: ‘For the time being, the real author of the writings passed down under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite is a mysterious figure, that manages to hide behind the writings in question in such a perfect way that no one so far has succeeded to submit more than mere guesswork as to his identity’.<sup>62</sup>

## NOTES

1. Hugo Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle des Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen', *Philologus* 54 (1895), 438–454; Josef Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus als Vorlage des sogenannten Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel', *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895), 253–273, and 721–748.
2. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 438.
3. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 254; Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 441.
4. Josef Stiglmayr, 'Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften und ihr Eindringen in die christliche Literatur bis zum Lateranconcil 649', in *IV. Jahresbericht des öffentlichen Privatgymnasiums an der Stella matutina* (Feldkirch: Selbstverlag der Anstalt [Privatgymnasium Stella matutina], 1895), 3–96.
5. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften', 26.
6. August Friedrich Gröner, *Allgemeine Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Adolf Krabbe Verlag, 1842), 912.
7. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 440–441; cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 254–255, and Johann Georg Veit Engelhardt, *Die angeblichen Schriften des Areopagiten Dionysius* (Sulzbach: Seidel Kunst- und Buchhandlung, 1823).
8. Cf. Michael Erler, *Proklos Diadochos über die Existenz des Bösen übersetzt und erläutert* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1978); Nestor Kavvadas, *Die Natur des Schlechten bei Proklos: Eine Platoninterpretation und ihre Rezeption durch Dionysios Areopagites* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).
9. One of the few cases where this happens is Josef Stiglmayr, *Des heiligen Dionysius Areopagita angebliche Schriften über Göttliche Namen. Angeblicher Brief an den Mönch Demophilus. Aus dem Griechischen übersetzt von Josef Stiglmayr* (Kempten/München: Kösel/Pustet, 1933), 9.
10. Stiglmayr, 'Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften', 27; for the theory of Neoplatonic plagiarism of the Areopagite and its adherers cf. Beate Regina Suchla, *Verteidigung eines platonischen Denkmodells einer christlichen Welt: Die philosophie- und theologiegeschichtliche Bedeutung des Scholienwerks der Johannes von Skythopolis zu den areopagitischen Traktaten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht, 1995), 19–20.
11. Cf. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 443, and 451–452; Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 260–273, and 721–746.
12. Cf. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 444–453; Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 265–273, and 721–746.
13. Cf. Josef Stiglmayr, 'Eine syrische Liturgie als Vorlage des Pseudo-Areopagiten', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 33 (1909), 383–385.
14. Cf. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 445.
15. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 257–258, and 262–265.
16. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 270–273.
17. Cf. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 446–448; Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 726.
18. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 724.
19. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 728–729.
20. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 731–734.
21. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 733.
22. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 257–259.
23. Cf. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 442, and 451–452.
24. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 259.

25. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 444.
26. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 748.
27. Cf. Piero Scazzoso, *Ricerche sulla struttura del linguaggio dello Pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita. Introduzione alla lettura delle opere pseudodionisiane* (Milan: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1967), 77–79; Eugenio Corsini, *Il trattato De divinis nominibus dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide* (Torino: Giappichelli, 1962); cf. also Kurt Ruh, *Die mystische Gotteslehre des Dionysius Areopagita* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987).
28. As, for example, Ceslaus Schneider, *Areopagitica. Die Schriften des heiligen Dionysius vom Areopag: Eine Verteidigung ihrer Echtheit* (Regensburg: Manz, 1884), and John Parker, *The celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite; now first translated into English from the original Greek by John Parker* (London: Skeffington, 1894).
29. Josef Stiglmayr, *Des heiligen Dionysius Areopagita angebliche Schriften über die beiden Hierarchien. Aus dem Griechischen übersetzt von Josef Stiglmayr* (Munich: Kösel, 1911), 16.
30. Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: 'No Longer I'* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27.
31. Stiglmayr, *Göttliche Namen*, 82.
32. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 747.
33. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 453.
34. E.R. Dodds, *Proclus, The Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), xxvi–xxviii; Wolfgang Gombocz, *Die Philosophie der ausgehenden Antike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997), 322.
35. Carlos Steel, 'Proclus et Denys: l'existence du mal', in Y. de Andia (ed.), *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 89–116; Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, *Proclus, On the Existence of Evils. The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
36. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 272, 727, 735, 733, 742, and Josef Stiglmayr, 'Die Lehre von den Sakramenten und der Kirche nach Pseudo-Dionysius', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 22 (1898), 246–303, at 383, respectively; cf. Friedemann Drews, *Methexis, Rationalität und Mystik in der 'Kirchlichen Hierarchie' des Dionysius Areopagita* (Berlin/Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 123, who comments on Stiglmayr's assessments critically.
37. Katerina Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.
38. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, vol. 2, *Fächer der Stile* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1962), 147–151.
39. Peter Tyler, *The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition* (London/New York: Continuum, 2011), 76.
40. Kavvadas, *Die Natur des Schlechten*, 115.
41. Dodds, *Proclus, The Elements of Theology*, xxviii.
42. Cf. Christian Schäfer, 'The Anonymous Naming of Names: Pseudonymity and Philosophical Program in Dionysius the Areopagite', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82 (2008), 561–580, at 563–564, on that problem.
43. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Aesthetics*, eds. John Riches and Joseph Fessio, vol. 2, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth et al. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), 144.
44. Von Balthasar, *A Theological Aesthetics*, 146.

45. Schäfer, 'The Anonymous Naming', 563; Christian Schäfer, *Unde malum? Die Frage nach dem Woher des Bösen bei Plotin, Augustinus und Dionysius vom Areopag* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), 403–404.
46. Cf. Schäfer, 'The Anonymous Naming', 569–572, and 579–580; Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity*, 203–205.
47. Cf., for example, Paul Rorem, 'The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor', in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 71–84, and Jean-Michel Counet, 'Grosseteste's Commentary on the Divine Names. A Cosmological Relevance?', in J. Cunningham (ed.), *Robert Grosseteste: His thought and its impact* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012), 63–78.
48. Von Balthasar, *A Theological Aesthetics*, 149; cf. Tyler, *Return to the Mystical*, 77.
49. Cf. Hugo Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen. Eine litterarhistorische Untersuchung* (Mainz: Verlag Franz Kirchheim: 1900).
50. Cf. Koch, 'Proklus als Quelle', 447.
51. Gförer, *Allgemeine Kirchengeschichte*, 912.
52. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proklus', 272.
53. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity*, 27.
54. Cf. Ronald F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the definition of order in the letters of Pseudo-Dionysius. A study in the form and meaning of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969), 8.
55. Josef Stiglmayr, 'Der sogenannte Dionysius Areopagita und Severus von Antiochien', *Scholastik* 3 (1928), 1–27 and 161–189, at 175–178; cf. Stiglmayr, *Göttliche Namen*, 162–174; for criticism of Stiglmayr's procedure, cf. Ruh, *Mystische Gotteslehre*, 8, and Hathaway, *Hierarchy*, 104.
56. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, 'The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality', in Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (trans.), *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 11–24.
57. Cf. Stiglmayr, 'Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften', 47–49.
58. Cf. Joseph Lebon, 'Le Pseudo-Denys L'Aréopagite et Sévère d'Antioche', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 26 (1930), 880–915.
59. Pelikan, 'The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality', 13.
60. Cf. Josef Stiglmayr, 'Um eine Ehrenrettung des Severus von Antiochien', *Scholastik* 7 (1932), 52–67.
61. Cf. Lebon, 'Le Pseudo-Denys L'Aréopagite'; interestingly, the immediate response to Lebon in Stiglmayr's 'Ehrenrettung des Severus' almost retracted the Severus thesis, whereas Stiglmayr's *Göttliche Namen* from 1933 seems to reaffirm it once more: cf. Hathaway, *Hierarchy*, 34.
62. Stiglmayr, 'Die beiden Hierarchien', 5.

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## CHAPTER 36

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# THREE THEOLOGIANS: DEAN INGE, VLADIMIR LOSSKY, AND VON BALTHASAR

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MARK EDWARDS

A volume on the reception of Dionysius through fifteen centuries will be bound to give more prominence to philosophers, mystics, poets, and theologians than to academic scholarship: the philological criticism which questioned the identity of the author in the early Byzantine era and the Renaissance was also felt to rob him of his authority in the Church, and hence of any further claim on students of theology as an intellectual discipline. By contrast, while the work of Koch and Stiglmayr silenced almost every remaining champion of his veracity, it also proved that the corpus had its own interest for historians as a rare hybrid of Christian dogma and informed philosophy in the late fifth century, the structure and purpose of which can be investigated either in conjunction with or independently of the question of authorship. Since it was barely possible to undertake such a task without becoming a theologian by proxy, the relation between theology and scholarship in the last century became symbiotic rather than adversarial, and the three authors who are discussed in the present essay all have a claim to be treated under both descriptions. If all have more reputation as theologians than as scholars, it should not be assumed that eminence in one sphere declines as it rises in the other. On the contrary, Von Balthasar is at once the most distinguished theologian and the most industrious scholar, whereas Inge under either name falls short of modern expectations. Each in his day, however, exerted an influence on Dionysian studies, and if as a triad they fall well short of a Trinity, they are for that reason all the better suited to stand individually as representatives of the Anglican, Orthodox, and Catholic traditions.

## W. R. INGE: DIONYSIUS AS A DECADENT PLATONIST

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William Ralph Inge (1860–1954), Victorian survivor of two world wars,<sup>1</sup> was famous in his own day as a prolific writer and broadcaster, pugnacious in his defence of Christianity and equally pugnacious in his assaults on those whose Christianity seemed to him atavistic, superstitious, or irrational—or as G. K. Chesterton said, only half in jest, on those who had not pared down their religion to a Plotinian standard of unbelief (1939: 154). An apologist for Christian faith and practice to a nation that was losing its religion, he was also an apologist for a typically English mixture of rationalism and devotion. At times he is surprised by the zeal of his own invectives against the sacramentalism of the Roman Church, with the tyranny and the moral enervation that he took to be its inevitable corollaries (Inge 1939: 377); he is just as far, however, from the anti-papalism of the Victorian era, which clung to the Thirty-Nine Articles as its talisman against every attempt of priestcraft to interrupt the honest business of earning a fortune and advancing in the world. The doctrinaire positions of Luther and Calvin, far from taming popery, had driven it back to its mediaeval posture by arresting the Renaissance, which in its heyday had been blessed and guided by the Vatican (Inge 1927: 52). The true spirit of Christianity lay neither in mumbling Latin over the wafer nor in parroting the shibboleths of justification by faith and substitutionary atonement, but in daily communion, reinforced by prayer, and sanctifying even the humblest of our endeavours, with the God who has revealed himself as love in the person of Christ.

### Inge on Dionysius

At least this is Christianity as it appears in his popular writings (e.g. Inge 1924). It is therefore perplexing at first to find that in books of a somewhat more technical character—none being, by any modern definition, academic—he should be at such pains to dissociate God from the very concept of personhood, at least as this was commonly employed by his Anglophone contemporaries. In his Paddock Lectures for 1906 he avers that ‘neither the word nor the western idea of a person has any existence in Greek or in the theology of Greek-speaking Christians’ (Inge 1907: 33); if it has a place in theory today, it is only so long as, to quote the Catholic Modernist George Tyrrell, ‘the fiction of God’s finitude and relativity is a necessity of man’s religious life’ (Inge 1907: 29). On the other hand, Inge was equally antipathetic to the ‘nihilism’ which had threatened the religious imagination of the West since the all but coeval births of Neoplatonism and Christianity (Inge 1899: 106). The *via negativa*, or approach to God through the absolute denial of any attribute, was not entirely erroneous, and served at least as a prophylactic

against another threat from the East, that of pantheism; we must indeed rise above the appetites of the lower soul and every temptation to bury the Creator in his creatures (Inge 1899: 115–116). But the consequence of this should not be to throw ourselves into the ocean of Nirvana, to cultivate an acosmism, a hatred of the phenomenal, which denies that there is such a thing as creation (Inge 1899: 111–113; 120). So profound is Inge's aversion to this philosophy of nothingness that he seems to prefer the mystics of the Counter-Reformation—whom he hesitates to call mystics at all—to those of the Middle Ages, because the latter, in setting up imageless meditation as the ideal, condemned the soul to a dissolution which, in spite of all pretensions to be transcending difference rather than excluding it, was bound to entail a loss of its identity, and hence of its capacity for love (Inge 1947: 57).

Between acosmism and pantheism sits the true understanding of personality, which is not simply given in our immediate consciousness but must be attained by rational and spiritual exertions to pass the limits which mark us off as individuals (Inge 1899: 31). The human capacity and inclination for such striving is revealed in us by consciousness, which creates a common sense of obligation in society but also emboldens a few great-souled individuals to defy the false moralities which take hold of us in the mass (Inge 1899: 32). The self is to be identified neither with the transient creature of circumstance nor with the ideal but with both (Inge 1899: 33). The greatest insight of the founder of Neoplatonism was to equate the realm of ideas with the *nous* of the Demiurge, thus imparting to one a dynamic and to the other a creative tendency which is best expressed in English by the word 'Spirit' (Inge 1918, vol. 2: 37–105). *Nous* in this sense is all but identical with the Logos of John and with *pneuma* or spirit in the letters of Paul (Inge 1907: 32–64). At the same time Plotinus betrays a thirst to escape from the plenitude of this intellectual or spiritual realm to a higher unity, devoid of every attribute; notwithstanding his efforts to avoid it, this equation of the infinite with the indefinite entailed the extinction of individuality, and in his later disciples the pursuit of the abstract led inevitably to acosmism and to the substitution of meaningless paradox for rational aspiration to communion with the Good.<sup>2</sup>

Inge displays little knowledge of the later Neoplatonists, but that is because, except in his Gifford lectures on Plotinus, he is chiefly a historian of Christian thought, and he has the perfect surrogate for Proclus in the saint who styled himself Dionysius the Areopagite. His works are seldom quoted by their titles, but it is evidently with reference to the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names* that Inge denounces the absurdity of grafting Indian nihilism on to Plato's theory of ideas.<sup>3</sup> Here as elsewhere, the conceit of 'Orientalizing Platonism' is taxonomic rather than genealogical: Inge is not postulating any journey to the East on the part of Dionysius or his Athenian masters. His objection is to the incoherence rather than the provenance of a theology which affirms in an almost pantheistic manner that God is the being of all things, yet at the same time declares—in a sentence quoted more than once by Inge, perhaps in mockery—that no monad or triad can express the all-transcending hiddenness of the all-transcending superessentially superexistent deity.<sup>4</sup> Dionysius does not win Inge's approval when he seeks a plane of knowledge beyond the persons of the Trinity;<sup>5</sup> nor

does he save himself from the worst concomitants of pantheism by arguing that the One imparts unity both to the sum of things and to each particular within it (Inge 1899: 108). By confounding causality with participation, he comes to the absurd conclusion that since the Good and the Beautiful are the cause of all, all things must have a share in them—and that (for all his disclaimers) is as much as to say that evil exists in God (Inge 1899: 106).

Inge does not pause to observe that both Iamblichus and Proclus had departed from Plotinus—or rather, had completed the thought that he initiated—by transferring the source of evil from matter to the soul. He acknowledges the peculiarly Christian character of the notion of divine darkness,<sup>6</sup> though without tracing it back to Clement, Philo, or Gregory of Nyssa; in contrast, and perhaps in opposition, to Evelyn Underhill,<sup>7</sup> he differentiates it from the internal state of dryness and anaesthesia which John of the Cross calls the dark night of the soul. While he barely remarks that the prime concern of Dionysius is hermeneutic, and says nothing of his balancing the apophatic against the cataphatic, he states that Dionysius grants to the higher soul a direct apprehension of the truths that are cloaked in the imagery of Scripture (Inge 1899: 109). It is not clear whether the proposition that God creates as the sun shines is to be numbered among these truths (Inge 1899: 108), and Inge does not shrink from describing *autozoë* and *autosophia* as emanations from the Godhead, notwithstanding the absence of this term in Dionysius (Inge 1899: 107). Noting that *eros* or love has its part in the Dionysian system,<sup>8</sup> he does not explore its relation to *agape* or the antecedents in Platonism for the ascription to higher principles of a downward-tending love which has no alloy of desire. Indeed he does not observe that love is an attribute of God in Dionysius, except by quoting the latter's own citation of Ignatius, 'my *eros* is crucified', where *eros* (correctly in Inge's view) is understood to mean Christ as lover of souls and object of their love.

## After Inge

Inge has much in common with Rolt,<sup>9</sup> the translator of the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*—not only in his retrenchment of Dionysian corpus to these two treatises, along with a couple of letters, not only in his unwillingness to stigmatize the Athenian school of Platonists for the Christian author's sins against Plotinus, but also in the reluctance to acknowledge *apatheia* or impassibility as an axiomatic property of God. Rolt has been claimed by Moltmann as one of the first opponents of this thesis; Inge in his reflections on the cross sets the conceit of vicarious suffering against that of vicarious punishment,<sup>10</sup> though he appears to have no quarrel with the doctrine of divine transcendence so long as this does not preclude God's capacity to love. Dionysius is thus redeemed, if at all, by his quotation from Ignatius; it is not, however, the animadversions of Inge on the corpus itself that helped to shape the course of Dionysian studies, but the example that he set for the future study of Platonism in his subtle and detailed lectures on Plotinus. Among those who have profited by and improved on his example, none has made a more distinguished contribution to modern understanding of Dionysius than

John Rist in his papers 'A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius' and 'Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul' (Rist 1966 and 1992).

In the first of these, Rist points out what Inge failed to say, that Dionysius follows the Christian precedent of Gregory of Nyssa in treating *eros* as a synonym for *agape*,<sup>11</sup> and that he surpasses all precedent, Christian or pagan, in making God himself the subject of an ecstatic *eros*, a love that takes him out of himself.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that pagans had no notion of condescending *eros*: as has been noted above, and as Rist himself observes, we find such a notion in Proclus' *Commentary in the First Alcibiades*.<sup>13</sup> Even less can Christians before Dionysius be charged with neglecting the text 'God is love' (1 John 4.8), which furnished a basis for the doctrine of the eternity of the Son. Yet even in the discourse of Christianity it required some audacity to predicate ecstasy—a going out of the self—of the God whom all knew to be changeless and impassive, and all the more so at a time when the monophysites, admirers if not creators of the Dionysian corpus, were regularly accused of teaching the transformation of divine nature into human flesh.

Of the two orthodox bugbears, Dionysius the monophysite and Dionysius the Platonist, Rist suggests, in his essay on Dionysius and the weakness of the soul, that the first is a figment while the second has been imperfectly defined.<sup>14</sup> Far from trying to intervene by stealth in a subtle logomachy—so stealthily that his own position is still too subtle for us—Dionysius was framing an expression of Christianity that 'worked' for readers who shared his own intellectual disposition (Rist 1992: 150). The Platonism that served him as a vehicle was a hybrid of Iamblichean theurgy and the ontology of Proclus, imitating the silence of Proclus himself with regard to his predecessor's notion of a unity so transcendent that it could be spoken of only as nothing.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of the fraud is to convince the Greeks that Porphyry was wrong and that to be a Christian is no betrayal of Plato. Rist's own paper accentuates the likeness between the two systems by treating the *eros* of Proclus' *Commentary on the First Alcibiades* as though it were typical of his metaphysics;<sup>16</sup> in contrast to the essay on *eros* and *agape*, the fact that God's love in Dionysius never takes the form of *epithumia* or desire remains unstressed (cf. Rist 1984: 242). Only the motif of the darkness of God, not that of his downward-tending love, is adduced from Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>17</sup> Rist cannot therefore be numbered with Ivánka and Völker as one who makes Dionysius a Christian rather than a Platonist;<sup>18</sup> on the other hand, he allows Vanneste to remind him that the follower of the Dionysian way is never alone because his faith is nourished at all times by the offices and practices of the Church.<sup>19</sup>

Inge is still cited, not without esteem, by modern students of Plotinus. His work on Dionysius has been superseded both by superior scholarship on the later Neoplatonists and by the more comprehensive readings of the corpus that took shape through Roques and Vanneste. It is a measure of our distance from him that John Dillon and Sarah Klitenic Wear (2007: 97–115), in a book whose primary purpose is to explore the Neoplatonic antecedents of Dionysius, find much in him that is irreducibly Christian when they set his use of the term *theourgia* against that of Iamblichus and Proclus. Like his pagan forerunners he enjoins the performance of ritual not in hope of swaying the divine will but as a means to the purification, edification, and, in his own words,

deification of the believer; at the same time, it is no small thing that for him it is Jesus Christ—the God-man rather than the soul, let alone the daemon—who acts as mediator between the visible and the transcendent. One consequence is that he makes use only of instruments and symbols which are hallowed by his own religion; another is that, because there is no encounter with Christ except through his body on earth, the Christian theurgist cannot work alone. The Iamblichean practitioner, who relies upon the extraordinary capacities of his own soul, seldom hopes to find a colleague: those who maintain that the true home of the Areopagite was the academy have yet to tell us where he went to church.

## VLADMIR LOSSKY: PALAMITE APOPHATICISM

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Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958)<sup>20</sup> is one of the foremost theologians of the Russian Church in the twentieth century, second to none in his influence on scholarship and theology in the West. Indeed, he wields an authority in some quarters which exceeds that of any Orthodox thinker since Palamas (whom he himself often sets against the West). A better comparison still, with respect to his aims and methods as well as his influence, might be drawn with John of Damascus, who furnishes the classic example of a systematic theology based upon the writings of the Fathers. As John was a creator as well as a synthesis, so was Lossky, the one bequeathing to Christendom the concept of Trinitarian perichoresis, while the other found a meaning for the term ‘person’ that was as faithful to modern usage as it was seminal in its application to patristic thought. The harbinger, if not the father, of Lossky’s neopatristic synthesis was Georges Florovsky, who shared his opposition to the Hegelianism which dominated Russian theology at the end of the nineteenth century (Gavrilyuk 2014: 234–242). The error of this movement, in Lossky’s view, were to confound the uncreated with the created, the eternal with the temporal, thereby denying at once the personhood of the Triune God and the freedom of those whom he has created in his image. The importance of Dionysius in his synthesis—an importance that does not quite amount to centrality, as Gavrilyuk (2014: 239) contends—lies in his perception of the Scriptures as a revelation, according to the measure of the recipient, of that which cannot be revealed in its infinite fulness to any creature.<sup>21</sup> This apophaticism, which is the cornerstone of Lossky’s notion of personhood, is also the subject of his famous study of Dionysius and the mystical tradition.

### The Affirmation of Negative Theology

In his brief account of the history of negative rheology before Dionysius, Lossky (1939: 204–205) does not begin where modern scholars are apt to begin with Philo of Alexandria, but with his Christian reader and admirer Clement, whose debts to Platonism had not escaped the notice of Lossky’s French contemporaries. By contrast,

he is quick to trace the shortcomings of Origen to the education which he shared with Plotinus in the school of Ammonius (Lossky 1939: 205). The latter's Neoplatonism, according to Lossky, taught that the unknowability of the One was merely provisional, and that once the aspiring soul was freed from the toils of matter and ignorance, it would enter into a state of absolute unity in which all distinction between the known and the knower, the object and the subject of desire, was annihilated. This, we are given to understand, was the doctrine of Origen also, although no text from him is quoted. The one reference to Plotinus, printed here as *Enneas* VI. 1. IX, is no doubt an error for 'Enneas VI. 9.9' (Lossky 1939: 205 n. 2), but this correction is hardly sufficient to substantiate Lossky's thesis. His summary appears to conflate two readings of Plotinus, in one of which the One is indeed in some sense an object beckoning us to union, while in the other—represented in Lossky's day by Stephen Mackenna's complete translation of the *Enneads* into English (1917–1930)—the expression *to hen* denotes not a 'One' distinct from the soul but the absolute unity which the soul pursues in its quest to escape the multiplicity of objective being. Proponents of the first view tend to maintain that some distinction between the soul and the One persists, whereas for those who hold the second there can be no question of the persistence of one or the other:<sup>22</sup> unity is an abstraction, which has no more content than a point has dimension, not even such content as would be entailed by the property of being one.

But if Lossky gives a jejune account of Neoplatonism, it does not follow that he is wrong in excluding Origen from the Christian tradition of negative theology. Modern scholars<sup>23</sup> have also drawn a contrast between the seeming accessibility of God in many passages of Origen and the accentuation of his unknowability—the mysticism of darkness, as some would style it—which is exemplified in the writings of the Cappadocia Fathers, and above all (to Western eyes at least) in Gregory of Nyssa. Lossky is aware, of course, that the Cappadocians have a polemical aim when they invoke the inscrutability of God against the Eunomians who attributed different essences to the Father and the Son, and he takes his longest specimen of their negative theology from the second of Nazianzen's *Theological Orations*, where it is argued that we know of God no more than that condescension to our infirmity which is described in Exodus as the showing of his back to Moses.<sup>24</sup> The preference of Nazianzen to Nyssen is characteristic of the Orthodox tradition, and Nazianzen (although he lacks a critical edition and was less digestible to the French *ressourcement*) is certainly the more circumspect theologian of the two. Here we might feel that mention of Gregory's mystical works, and not least his *Life of Moses*, was in order; the transition to Dionysius in Lossky's essay, however, does not bring us immediately into the sphere of mystical theology, but into that of religious epistemology. The innovation of Dionysius, he argues, was to balance the apophatic with the cataphatic, the philosophic renunciation of speech with the submission in rational faith to the speech of God.

Lossky understands Dionysius to say that the revelation of God in Scripture, according to the capacity of the one who reads, is an instance of his perpetual irradiation of the created order by a light whose source is so far above us that it appears as darkness (Lossky 1939: 207–209). Within this darkness God enfolds in a manifold unity



all the beams which fall upon his creatures one by one as discrete illuminations of the awakened soul. In each of them, nevertheless, the whole fulness of his divinity is made present to us, although his essence remains unknowable—a formula which reminds us of Gregory Palamas, whom Lossky (1939: 211) couples with Theodore the Studite, as the heir and interpreter of Dionysius. Elsewhere Lossky says that the Western Church has often failed to grasp the spirit of Dionysius because it is ignorant of the Palamite distinction between the essence and the energies of God (Lossky 1939: 209–211); in the present essay he quietly puts to rest another error, that of reading Dionysius as a Platonist, by denying that that he entertained a theory of emanation, that is of a graduated presence of divinity in the world with diminishing power (Lossky 1939: 211 n. 1). He is certainly right, inasmuch as *aporrhōia* is not a word to be found in the Areopagite, but this fact alone does not justify the suppression of his Platonic antecedents when so much was made of the pagan schooling of Origen. Modern students of Plotinus, after all, observe that illumination, not emanation, is his dominant metaphor for the superabundance of the One to the lower realms.<sup>25</sup>

Nor indeed has this perceptive account of his doctrine of revelation put any distance between Dionysius and Origen, for what could be more typical of Origen than to speak of God's revealing himself according to the capacity of the recipient?<sup>26</sup> And is not the cataphatic way of knowledge in Dionysius foreshadowed in Origen's long disquisition on the *epinoiai*, or acquired names, through which we speak of the Second Person of the Trinity than in Basil's disparagement of *epinoiai* as misleading proxies for true *ennoiai*, or concepts, of the divine? If the Areopagite is to part company with the Alexandrian, it will be in his shift from the merely hermeneutic quest for the mystical sense in Scripture to the epistemic quest for immediate knowledge of the mysteries to which this sense corresponds. As Lossky observes, Dionysius does in fact contrast two levels of intellection, one 'according to us' by which we perceive the intelligibles which are hidden from the sense, and a higher one, which is not according to us, because it lifts it out of ourselves and unites us in ecstasy to that which is above knowledge.<sup>27</sup> In the course of this advent the soul becomes conscious of the *logoi* of creation, which Lossky associates with the Platonic ideas.<sup>28</sup> Since the honorific names that we give to God are true of him inasmuch as he is the cause of all that is honourable, the summit of the ascent will be not the mere knowledge that he is the cause of all—for such knowledge is still of the cataphatic order—but an ineffable consciousness of his transcendence. This does not mean, however, that the soul will have outgrown dogma, or even that every concrete revelation will become otiose: on the contrary it is only the self-revealing love of God for his world (and not, as Lossky might have added, our thirst for him, as Plato and Nygren's Dionysius argue) that makes this ecstasy possible. The sovereign Cause with which, or rather with whom, the soul achieves its wordless union is none other than Jesus Christ, the Word enfleshed (Lossky 1939: 220).

No doubt this itinerary takes us far beyond Origen, who, while he speaks of spiritual senses (lest we should misconstrue the seeing or tasting of the Lord in biblical texts), does not construct a theory explaining how the exercise of these will permit us to grasp the spirit or soul of Scripture. Allusions to any supranoetic experience in Origen are rare

and ambivalent, even when he is reading the Song of Songs as an epithalamium on the marriage of the soul with the Word whose incarnation is the text itself. The knowledge of the laws of nature and providence which, according to the First Principles, is accorded to the soul in its journey through the planetary spheres may be, for all we know, of a propositional rather than intuitive or experiential character; even that supervenient state, in which God is all in all—that state whose foretaste all conception except in those who have suffered them—is not represented as a cloud or a night in which the light of intellection is extinguished. It is possible, though not proven, that by the God who is all in all he means the Father alone. This is not to deny that he too gives a cardinal place to the Second Person in the regimen, but where Dionysius always lays the stress on Christ's divinity even in his earthly mission, Origen takes the historical epiphany of the Word in our threefold nature as his mandate for seeking out the soul and spirit of the Word in Scripture, within and beyond its truth as history.

## Reception of Lossky

In his remarkable essay on Lossky's negative theology, Rowan Williams notes that he is selective in his handling of those authors who do not fit his patristic synthesis (Williams 2007: 18). He also observes that twentieth-century scholarship has refined our understanding of the emergence of Neoplatonism from its Greek matrix, refuting the undisciplined comparisons with more exotic traditions that were frequently drawn in Lossky's era, even by trained students of antiquity.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, he believes that Lossky has drawn a sound contrast between the intellectual and the agnostic paths to the liberation of finite consciousness. Alluding to Lossky's definition of personhood as the irreducibility of a hypostasis to its essence (Williams 2007: 17–19), he shows that it is a necessary corollary of his thought that God in himself should be unknowable, and that only in the human person of Jesus, at once as familiar and as inscrutable as any other person, can he bring us to union with him through a love that both inspires and will outlive reason. Thus portrayed, this Orthodox thinker cannot fail to remind us of Karl Rahner, his Roman Catholic contemporary, for whom the incarnation is the revelation of being as mysterious; it will be a surprise to many that he also reminds us of Karl Barth, for whom mysticism is a severe distemper of the false religiosity which imagines that it can reach God by its own efforts through something other than his plenary revelation in Jesus Christ. Even the asceticism of Dionysius becomes in Lossky (at least as Williams reads him) a recognition that Christ meets us not in glory but in the humility of total self-abandonment—that is, in the way of the Cross (Williams 2007: 14–15), which many Protestants of Lossky's time believed to have been lost in patristic thought.

In fairness to Harnack and Nygren, it must be pointed out that, whatever it is to Lossky, the Cross is almost nothing to Dionysius. In his own time this indifference is unusual, but the Cross is also an elusive symbol in some of the earlier authors in Lossky's patristic synthesis, and even in many writings by the Cappadocian Fathers. Williams, whose concern is primarily with the constructive theology of Lossky, can forgive him

for his occasional excesses of charity in the reading of his predecessors; by the same token, however, we might expect him to be more critical of his uncharitable readings, above all when they are manifestly baseless and prejudicial. Perhaps it would be best to pass over in silence the many passages in which he accuses Origen of postulating a natural kinship or *sungenneia* between the mind and God, without once supplying a reference to a passage from Origen's voluminous works.<sup>30</sup> It is easy enough to quote passages to the contrary, in which Origen says, for example, that we are not the image of God but made 'according to his image', that is to Christ,<sup>31</sup> or that our reasoning element (*logikon*) partakes of Christ as the mediating Logos between the human and the divine. Logos, we learn in the *Commentary on John*, is that *epinoia* which pertains to the Logos not in his relation to the Father but in his relation to the world;<sup>32</sup> we may argue as to whether his role as mediator implies subordination to the Father, but we cannot deny that it is precisely that in which Christ differs from the Father—from God in himself, the *autotheos*<sup>33</sup>—that makes him a possible object of participation. It is necessary to point this out—just as it is necessary to point out that Lossky at times holds Clement accountable to anachronistic standards of orthodoxy, and in a work that is apologetic rather than dogmatic—because Dionysius himself has been the target of so much tendentious polemic, not only in Protestant but in Orthodox circles. These polemics are all too often fathered by the assumption (so uncharacteristic of Williams, if not of Lossky) that a Christian cannot be sure of being right unless he can prove some other Christian to be wrong.

In a history of Byzantine Christology by Lossky's friend John Meyendorff, Dionysius is once again presented as an opponent of Origen, Neoplatonism, and the rationalism of his own followers in the West (Meyendorff 1975: 91–111). Origen once again stands on the wrong side of a contrast between the darkness that arises from our own finitude and the darkness that is inherent in God himself (Meyendorff 1975: 93). His theory that every rational agent occupies the place which it has earned by its own sin saves him at least from the emanationism of the Greeks, for every being owes its place in the cosmic order to the inexorable and unconscious superfetation of the first principle (Meyendorff 1975: 92). It is Dionysius, however, who understands that our capacity for union with God is grounded neither in our current sense of freedom nor in any mechanical principle of reversion but in the quickening of the soul by supernal energies which quicken in us an ecstatic reciprocation of God's own ecstatic love.<sup>34</sup> If he errs in positing a knowledge of the Godhead which transcends the knowledge of the three divine persons, this is to be ascribed, in Meyendorff's view, to his monophysitic tendencies.<sup>35</sup> He does not explain this conjecture, but perhaps his reasoning is that an impersonal God is the natural correlative of an anhypostatic Christ. Dionysius has at least derived from the Cappadocians a distinction between the essence and the energies of God which was ignored by Barlaam and his Western allies when they tried to invoke his authority against his true disciple, Gregory Palamas.<sup>36</sup> Writing some decades after the early death of Lossky, Meyendorff has learned from René Roques (1954: 267–269) to read the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* as necessary adjuncts to this doctrine of mutual ecstasy, and as writings which cement the Areopagite's place in the Orthodox tradition (Meyendorff 1975: 106).

The ninefold ordering of the angels is partially adumbrated in John Chrysostom, the Apostolic Constitutions, and Cyril of Jerusalem;<sup>37</sup> the hierarchy on earth is a mirror of its eternal counterpart, and the Christ who awaits us at the summit of the angelic ladder is the same Christ whom we encounter, as we encounter every other soul at its holiest, in the material sacrament of bread and wine.

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR: DIONYSIAN AESTHETICS

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The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) is the most catholic of all Catholic thinkers. Although he wrote more often in German than in French, he must be regarded as a leading exponent of *ressourcement*, the enterprise of rejuvenating Catholic teaching by a return to its patristic sources which preceded the Second Vatican Council. This movement (also known, more contentiously, as the *nouvelle theologie*<sup>38</sup>) added musical, liturgical, and homiletic texts to the standard libraries of dogma, and by its appeal to works that had hitherto been received with more esteem in other traditions—particularly the writings of the Greek Fathers—it assumed an ecumenical character, tending at times to a universal promise of salvation. Von Balthasar, who did not disavow universalism, found material for his distinctive approach to theology through aesthetics in Christian texts of every age and genre, from the *Didache* to Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Perhaps his greatest contribution both to ecumenical and to historical theology was his essay on the cosmology of Maximus the Confessor, an author then little known in the West. Its title, *Cosmic Liturgy*, expresses his own conviction, which he also attributes to Maximus, that the transcendent is revealed not so much through propositions as through symbols, which call upon our imagination to grasp the infinite in the finite. By symbolism Von Balthasar means not merely a verbal or visual representation but a drawing of the believer into the presence of God through action, and the word 'liturgy' is not restricted to ecclesiastical ceremonies. He rightly perceives Dionysius as one of the most important precursors of Maximus, and was later to devote a long section of *The Glory of God* to an erudite and innovative exposition of the Dionysian corpus. A brief account of these two exercises will show that, while Von Balthasar never read Dionysius without insight, his understanding matured when he read him a second time, for his own sake, and with the tools that had been put at his disposal by the advance of scholarship.

### Dionysius as Precursor of Maximus

The summaries of Dionysian thought in *Cosmic Liturgy* may strike us as more ejaculatory than descriptive. The young Maximus, we are told, fell under the spell of the

Areopagite's ecstatic vision of a sacred universe, which issued wave by wave from the divine centre and diffused itself, with ever-diminishing power, to the limits of being. This universe, we are told, was held together from tier to tier by a common love of its Author, as the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies jointly performed the solemn dance of liturgical adoration around the mysterious divine Trinity. A consciousness of the ineffable proximity of the Source in all its emanation was coupled with a sense of the ever-increasing distance of the one who is above all, more inconceivable than the inconceivable. In this fascinating vision of the works a certain inebriation was mingled with a holy and pure lucidity that had hitherto eluded Cappadocia and Alexandria, Egypt and Antioch: Dionysian thought is a confluence of Origen's volcanic insights, Gregory of Nyssa's thirst for the infinite, the autumnal wisdom of Gregory Nazianzen, the equanimity of Basil, and the cosmic sense of Proclus, prefiguring at the same time the late Byzantine taste for grandeur and liturgical figuration. With the suddenness of lightning, the harmonious coexistence of all the realms of the world was revealed, with all their hierarchies and relations, with their alternating ascents to the unseen summit and their descents to the depths of matter. Never had Christianity seen a vision of such amplitude within the majestic stability of peace (Balthasar 2003a: 58).

Von Balthasar makes three pronouncements on matters of academic controversy in this encomium, one in a footnote and one at the end. Against Stiglmayr, he says that he cannot believe Dionysius to have been Severus of Antioch, not only because he is no monophysite but because the exuberance of his diction is quite foreign to the plain and tepid manner of the Antiochene Patriarch (Balthasar 2003a: 50). Indeed, he says, Christology did not come easily to Dionysius, whose enterprise was rather to 'strike mystical sparks out of scholastic flint' (Balthasar 2003a: 51). He pays tribute to the originality of the Areopagite, crediting him with a shaping of the cosmos from above by illumination which turns on its head the Stoic principle, favoured by Gregory of Nyssa's, of building essences from below (Balthasar 2003a: 161). This cryptic judgement is not substantiated or explained in the book on Maximus, but in Von Balthasar's *Presence and Thought* the Cappadocian is credited with doctrines of divine immanence and the interpenetration of matter and spirit which are commonly attributed to the Stoics (Balthasar 1995: 38–55). Gregory is repeatedly contrasted here with Origen (Balthasar 55, 63, 68 etc.), who no doubt inhabits the other side of the antithesis drawn on p. 79 between the Posidonian side of Gregory that last claim to the rights of the corporeal world and the Neoplatonic 'flight into the spirit'. Von Balthasar is as hostile as Inge to theologies of transcendence which preclude immanence, while perceiving that in Gregory, as also in Dionysius, it is transcendence that makes immanence possible. The third and most important of Von Balthasar's philological speculations is his attempt to disengage the authentic words of John of Scythopolis from a corpus of scholia on Dionysius which are ascribed by Migne to Maximus. Taking as his guide a Syriac rendering of John which he admits to be selective, he concludes that we see the hand of this early commentator in texts whose aim is to prove the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus, to vindicate it from charges of heresy or of forgery by the Apollinarians, and to furnish apposite precedents or parallels from pagan literature (Balthasar 2003a: 359–372).

Gregory of Nyssa is the hero of many narratives in which he restores the body—or, as some would say, concreteness of being—to its place at the core of Christian thought, from which it had been extruded by the Platonism of Origen. Von Balthasar did not complete his projected study of Origen, though an adumbration of it appeared in English as the preface to a volume in the series entitled *Classics of Western Spirituality* (Balthasar 2003a: 36–37). In *Cosmic Liturgy*, however, he sets the great Alexandrian against Maximus in his usual role as a Platonizing detractor of the body, and the ‘provisional universe’ which he tolerates merely as a prison for souls is found to be of a piece with the Neoplatonic cosmos of Dionysius, which is nothing more than an emanation, and hence a fall, of the ideal into the material according to a rhythm of procession and return, picturesquely characterized by Von Balthasar as a diastole and systole of the divine. He subscribes here, with some flourishes of his own, to the prevalent understanding of Neoplatonism, and cannot be blamed for his failure to anticipate the more rigorous inquiries of later scholars into the use of the term ‘emanation’ in Plotinus and his successors.<sup>39</sup> He appears at least to reject the schematic contrast, drawn by Hausherr, between an Evagrian theory of divine immanence and a Dionysian theory of divine transcendence.<sup>40</sup> In deprecating this position, he seems to put on new spectacles, discovering that Dionysius extends the peace of God to the limits of being, and concluding that his system marries Neoplatonism with the Stoic celebration of variety in the realm of matter. This is a silent retraction of his earlier claim that Dionysius inverts the Stoicism of Nyssen—a retraction that would have taken a different form had he perused the treatise of Proclus *On the Origin of Evil*, in which the theory that evil has its seat in matter is vigorously denied.

Von Balthasar concedes to Dionysius that his negative theology is balanced by a positive complement: as God has no proper name, all names are equally predicable of him. The more he affirms the transcendence of God and his perfect otherness in relation to the world, the less he can speak of anything in this world except in relation to his transcendence, so that transcendence becomes the measure of immanence (Balthasar 2003: 94). Even if he does not assert creation from nothing as clearly as his dragoman John of Scythopolis (Balthasar 2003a: 113), his cosmology resembles that of Aristotle in pointing to the ‘indissoluble autonomy of the created world’ (Balthasar 2003a: 49). A modern scholar might prefer to say that Dionysius was holding the balance, not between the transcendence and immanence of God, but between the first and second antinomies of the Parmenides; Von Balthasar makes no reference to this dialogue or to its Neoplatonic commentators, but applies their image of the ‘golden chain’ to the hierarchy of intermediate powers in both Dionysius and Maximus. In pagan thought it betokens a continuity between higher and lower orders of being which is both unbroken and eternal; but Dionysius, according to Von Balthasar, avoids the worst consequences of plagiarism by weaving the chain into the dialectic between his positive and his negative theology. For all that, he assumes—notwithstanding the biblical and Christian precedents noted above in our discussion of Meyendorff—that Dionysius is following the Platonists under the influence of Origen, when he sets nine orders of angels between the Creator and the soul (Balthasar 2003a: 83–84). Maximus, by contrast, has escaped



the Platonic tendency to erase what is individual in our humanity—a tendency that Ferdinand-Christian Baur had associated with the alleged monophysitism of Dionysius (Balthasar 2003a: 85). Without challenging Baur, Von Balthasar places Maximus between Dionysius and his Latin interpreter, John Scotus Eriugena, who gave a cosmological turn to his teaching. In the first of the three the key to the apprehension of things divine is the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and in the third a cosmic gnosis: it is Maximus, of course, who strikes a humane and catholic mean between these excesses with his cosmic liturgy.

## Dionysius on the Glory of God

Notwithstanding its title, *Cosmic Liturgy* makes little to the offices and functions of the Church in Dionysius. Von Balthasar redeems this omission on volume 2 of *The Glory of the Lord* which bears the title *Clerical Styles* (Balthasar 1984: 144–210). Opining that one who speaks so humbly of the monastic state must be a monk, he defends the pseudonym as an illustration of the author's own precept that the servant of God must lose his identity in his office. Seeing no reason to doubt the existence of the lost works, he finds a discrepancy in thought and style between the Stoic cosmology of the author and the Platonism of the two works attributed to his tutor Hierotheus, and argues that the teacher is as likely to be real as his pupil was honest (Balthasar 1984: 155–157). He suggests that the key to the unity of the corpus was another lost work, the *Divine Hymns*,<sup>41</sup> in which mortal choirs are urged to give tongue in answer to the mingled jubilation of the angelic hierarchies. The symbolism of Scripture and the sacraments is another form of this wakening of praise below by influence from above (Balthasar 1984: 178–183): it is this antiphony rather than any mechanical operation, that unites us to God through the liturgy, and the aesthetic plays a role in the Christian revelation of God that is denied to it in Plato (Balthasar 1984: 184, 194 etc.). The structures of Church and cosmos are the immanent counterparts of the transcendent names, so that with the heightening of our capacities, the symbol which was once no more than an artefact becomes first, in the positive mode, an unfolding mystery of the Church and then, in the negative mode, an approximation to the ineffable.

Taking up a theme that he had developed in his study of Karl Barth (2003b), Von Balthasar argues that, while there is an *analogia entis*, an analogy of being between the creature and its Creator in Dionysius, there is also an asymmetry, since the word is both like and unlike God whereas God is not like the world.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, God stands in an archetypal role to the world, so that on the one hand he need not go out of himself to know the world, and in the other hand each of his creatures is capable of an ecstatic 'participation in his reconciling and unifying power' which reciprocates his ecstatic descent to the world in love (Balthasar 1984: 169 and 171). Against René Roques,<sup>43</sup> whom in many respects he follows, Von Balthasar denies that Christology is a mere appendix to the Dionysian system: the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies cannot act as mediators of grace and revelation were it not that the immutable one 'gives a share of himself' to the



world in many degrees of intimacy, of which the incarnation is at once the most intimate and the most universal. The divine aesthetic cannot be appreciated in any solitary experience, and the defection of the soul from the cosmic order that we call sin impairs the working of the sacraments even in priests and theologians: purifying, illuminating, and unifying grace is the precondition of both ecstasy and communion (Balthasar 1984: 175), and conversely the illumination of the soul *kat' axian* is not so much according to its merits—since all merit is from God—but in accordance with the harmony and symmetry of creation (Balthasar 1984: 173). Imparting himself in his fulness to every creature, yet in the graduated measure of the creature's own receptivity (Balthasar 1984: 189), dispensing through Life, Wisdom, and Divinity the supreme light which accentuates his own darkness (Balthasar 1984: 185–188), he who descends from the morning which is beyond nothing can give a 'positive value to finitude' without sanctioning either 'an immanent ontology of the creature' or a chimerical 'doctrine of God as he is in himself' (Balthasar 1984: 194 and 188). The futility of both can be exposed by noticing that the word *hyperousios* (superessential) occurs 115 times.

Where others see Dionysius above all as the prophet of divine infinitude and inscrutability, Von Balthasar dwells at all times on the immediacy of God's presence to his creatures, treating the fact that the creature's awareness of him is proportioned to its rank and station (Balthasar 1984: 196 etc.) as evidence that Dionysius brings a 'theological aesthetic' to his appreciation of the concrete and finite. In the Church too he finds not only two orders—that of bishops, priest, and deacons, and that of monks, holy men, and catechumens—which assign each believer to a particular rank in relation to God and other believers, but a third, that of the sacraments, which imparts to all the same new birth through baptism and a union with the same Christ through the Eucharist, together with the three discrete operations of anointing for confirmation, ordination, and extreme unction (Balthasar 1984: 199). The reticence of Dionysius with regard to the practical use and administration of the sacraments betokens no hostility to the embodiment of the divine, but is prescribed by the same *disciplina arcani*, or doctrine of reserve, which envelops his teaching on theology, angelology, the Scriptures, tradition, and Christian life (Balthasar 1984: 152–153). Von Balthasar appears to see this reserve as the proper response of the creature to the unveiling of the invisible, which cuts across the distinction between the mysticism and darkness and the mysticism of light.

If sceptical admiration has been the dominant strain in scholarly responses to Von Balthasar's repainting of Dionysius,<sup>44</sup> it is surely not because he is defying tradition but rather because he seems disposed to revive traditions which most would judge to be irreversibly superannuated. Our astrophysics will not allow a modern Dante to put the earth at the centre of a universe of nine revolving spheres, each guided by its own order of angels;<sup>45</sup> our democratic souls cannot be taught to revere the ecclesiastical offices, with their all-too-human occupants, as though they were rungs on a ladder from earth to heaven; for all that Von Balthasar says of the 'stupendous knowledge of scripture' in Dionysius (Balthasar 1984: 208), it will always be easy to prove by the statistics of quotation that the gospels are not at the heart of his churchmanship. The very notion of receptivity in accordance with one's station raises a question as to our freedom in determining

our station which might not be logically soluble without some theory of pre-existence akin to that which the Church condemns by the name of Origenism. Inge's reading of Dionysius as an Orientalizing mystic is certainly more selective and tendentious, but it sets before us a path that we might choose to follow; Von Balthasar's interpretation is richer, more sympathetic, and in many respects more faithful, but it is like the recollection of a dream from which we are not entirely sorry to have awoken.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Of the three authors canvassed here, it is Inge who, in accordance with his own interests, treats Dionysius primarily as mystic, and one whom he finds all the less to his taste the more he is bound to admit his influence on the subsequent tradition. Lossky is kinder to his apophaticism but, notwithstanding his own desire for the reinvigorating of Orthodox thought from patristic sources, hardly more conscious than Inge of the liturgical setting of the ascent from ignorance to voluntary unknowing. For Von Balthasar, by contrast, the term 'liturgy' encompasses the harmonious ordination of every element in the cosmos for the good of its inhabitants and the glory of its Creator. In this sense he learns from Maximus to discern the liturgical shape of Dionysian theology, but it seems to have been his perusal of the French scholars Roques and Vanneste that revealed to him, as it also revealed to the Orthodox Meyendorff, the mirroring of the cosmic rhythms in Dionysius' precepts for the ordering of the Church. This it is not the Orthodox alone who affirm the cardinal role of the hierarchies in the Dionysian system, but scholars and theologians of every tradition who read the corpus as a whole and without any limiting concept of the mystical.

## NOTES

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1. On his life see Fox 1960.
2. Inge 1899: 106. On the irreligiosity of pantheism see 118.
3. Inge 1899: 106. At 105 the God of Dionysius is equated with the suprarational monad of Neoplatonism. Cf. also Inge 1947: 60, where the distinction between *nirguna* and *saguna* Brahman is understood as a setting of the Godhead against God.
4. Inge 1947: 59, citing *Divine Names* 13.3, p. 229.10–14 Suchla.
5. Inge 1947: 53, perhaps alluding to *Divine Names* 2.5, p. 129.6–11 Suchla.
6. Inge 1899: 109. Contrast Inge 1947: 59: 'the Atman is silence'.
7. Underhill 1909: 393 suggests this assimilation, although it is not sustained by the rest of the chapter.
8. Inge 1899: 110–111, noting the citation of Ignatius, Romans 7.2.
9. On Rolt 1913 see Moltmann 1981: 31–34 and Brierley 2018. On Rolt as translator of Dionysius see the introduction to this volume.
10. Inge, 'Confessio Fidei', in Inge 1922: 47.

11. Rist 1966: 237–238, citing *Patrologia Graeca* 44, 1048c. On Origen see 239.
12. Rist 1966: 239–240. At 243, reversing his judgement in Rist 1964: 206, Rist opines that Origen and Dionysius may be correct to understand *eros* as Christ when Ignatius writes at *Romans* 7.2 ‘my *eros* is crucified’.
13. Rist 1966: 241. For Dionysius as a follower of Proclus rather than Plotinus in his notion of *henôsis* with the first principle see Rist 1964: at 223.
14. Rist 1992: 135–137. On his avoidance of terminology that would define him as Chalcedonian or anti-Chalcedonian, see ‘Weakness’, 154.
15. Rist 1992: 146. On the incarnation as theurgy see 154.
16. Rist 1992: 147, noting correctly that the works ascribed to Hierotheus have titles of works by Proclus.
17. Rist 1992: 150, though the notion of *philanthropia* is said to ‘bear the stamp of Cappadocian Christianity’ at 149.
18. Völker 1958. Ivánka 1964: 228–242 argues that the triadology of Proclus has been overlaid by one based on the dedication of Constantine’s churches to Holy Wisdom, Holy Peace, and Holy Power.
19. Vanneste 1959: 206–217, cited by Rist 1992: 159 n. 59.
20. For further bibliography and discussion of Lossky’s influence see Gavriluk 2008: 712–716.
21. On this see above all Lossky 1930: 289–292
22. See further Edwards 2013.
23. E.g. Louth 2007: 72.
24. Nazianzen, *Second Theological Oration* 3 (*Patrologia Graeca* 26.28–29), cited at Lossky 1939: 206, n. 2. Cf. Mason 1899: 24–25.
25. See Schroeder 1996: 341: ‘All figurative language other than illuminationist imagery is to be qualified in the direction of fulfilling the conditions for illumination’. On emanation see Schroeder, 348.
26. See e.g. *First Principles* 3.6.1, p. 280.4–5 in *De Principiis*, ed. P. Koetschau Leipzig: Hinrichs 1899).
27. Lossky 1939: 213 n. 3, citing *Divine Names* 7.1.
28. Lossky 1939: 208; Lossky 1930: 285–288.
29. Williams 2007: 12. Williams notes again on pp. 14 and 16 that Lossky does little justice to the doctrine of divine *ecstasis* in Dionysius or in Platonism.
30. Lossky 1974: 134 and 138; *The Vision of God*, trans. A. Moorhouse (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1983), 58–59, citing *First Principles* 4.36. The text of Rufinus, at Koetschau 1899: 362–363 affirms nothing more than the soul’s participation in the divine nature; Lossky appears to be following Jerome, *Letter to Avitus* 14, reproduced at the foot of Koetschau, 362; but this implies that Origen shirked the heresy of saying that God and his creatures were literally of one nature.
31. *First Principles* 1.2.6, pp. 34–36 Koetschau.
32. *Commentary on John* 1.24.151–154 = Limone 2016: 201–2016); 2.16.114 = Limone 2016: 310.
33. *Commentary on John* 2.2.17 = Limone 2016: 268.
34. *Christ*, 95, adding: ‘Pseudo-Dionysius detaches himself therefore completely from two neo-Platonic postulates: the natural divinity of the *voûc* and the knowability of the divine essence’.
35. *Christ*, 99, citing *Divine Names* 2.5.
36. Lossky 1983: 127 and 154–158; *Image ad Likeness*, 120–122, with criticism of Von Balthasar. On the alleged misreading of the doctrine of analogy by Aquinas see Gavriluk 2008: 713, citing Lossky 1930.

37. Meyendorff 1975: 102 n. 26, citing Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homilies* 23.6; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 4.5; *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.27.
38. See further Boersma 2009: 116–148.
39. Balthasar 2003a: 155 describes emanationism as a secondary principle in Dionysius.
40. Balthasar 2003a: 36, 94, also rejecting the judgment of Villers that Maximus is a plagiarist of Evaegius.
41. Balthasar 1984: 160–161. See *Celestial Hierarchy* 7.4, p. 311.24–25 Heil and Ritter.
42. Balthasar 1984: 168, citing *Divine Names* 9.6.
43. Balthasar 1984: 162, alluding generally to *L'univers dionysien*.
44. See Jones 2008: 746, citing Daley 2004: 201–202, with Roberts 1987: 16, Kannengiesser 1991: 59–63 and Boersma 2009: 129, where Von Balthasar is said (with some reserve) to have made the Dionysian notion of participation a ‘harbinger of the Thomist doctrine of analogy’.
45. Against carrying theological convictions with a high hand into the realm of science see Inge, *God and the Astronomers* (London: Longmans 1933).

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## CHAPTER 37

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# THE RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS IN MODERN GREEK THEOLOGY AND SCHOLARSHIP

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DIMITRIOS PALLIS

## INTRODUCTION

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A complete evaluation of the reception of an ancient Christian author within a particular modern tradition requires a number of factors to be taken into account and it is certain that only some of them may be addressed satisfactorily in a concise essay of this kind. Perhaps a framework as rich as modern Greek theology and scholarship deserves an entire volume in itself, given that it includes a number of readers of the writings of Dionysius who have devoted scholarly studies to them or employed these to develop their own theological syntheses. A study of the present framework becomes more complex if one considers that, particularly after the 1960s, this interesting author began to be part of important discussions concerning the content and orientation of Orthodox thought of that time and motivated some Greek theological thinkers to adopt a particular attitude to him that was mostly—but not always—positive. The hermeneutical challenge lies in the need to maintain a distance from one's object of study so as to point out the broader cultural narratives within which these thinkers articulated their ideas and the influences reflected in their published work from their research abroad. One may add to these the difficulty of assessing whether their perspectives were compatible with their initial intentions judging from the standards of their own time as well as from later developments in their tradition.

This essay will outline the notable stages in the study of Dionysius in twentieth-century Greek Orthodox theology and scholarship. After this introduction to the topic of research, the complexities of the Greek scene will be discussed; these may help to explain the considerable diversity often found in the way this ancient author is handled



by the Greek theologians. The next part will focus on specific political and social factors that have or could have affected the development of the study of patristic literature in universities and the public sphere as well as possible ways these could be reflected in the bibliography on Dionysius. The fourth part will examine three readers from the interwar and the postwar periods: Emmanouel Karpathios, Christos Yannaras, and John Zizioulas. The first of these theologians followed a different approach from the other two, who adopted similar methods but developed different viewpoints.

## THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE GREEK SCENE

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Before embarking on a critical analysis of these topics, it is worth mentioning a few particularities of the Greek scene that may be necessary for Anglophone readers. There seem to be some popular views about the attitude of Greek scholars to Dionysius that need to be clarified in order to discern to what extent they were influenced by Greek or foreign trends and in what ways they developed their own lens with which to interpret their patristic predecessors. In some cases Greek theologians tend to be studied without consideration of their agenda and the matters that concerned their disciples and followers as well as their broader readership in Greece.

### The Relation to Russian Émigré Religious Thought

It is often argued that after the 1960s a few intellectuals from the above context were greatly influenced by developments and doctrinal debates in the philosophical theology and scholarship of the Russian Diaspora in France and the United States. While this remark holds true, it is necessary to clarify that further here. This connection does not necessarily indicate a slavish adoption of ideas. Rather, in several cases it proved to be a creative transplantation of the matters of discussion to the Greek scene. An appropriate approach to the relationship between these two might be to judge the arguments of specific Greek authors primarily in the original context in which they articulated them, as well as the broader local cultural narratives that were combined with that inter-Orthodox inheritance.

If one follows this line of reasoning, it becomes evident that Greek theology has a special character: while some Greek theologians were students of or in close contact with Russian émigré thinkers who were holders of academic positions, they followed considerably different paths in their own syntheses. The comparison of the views of John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon (b. 1931), and Fr. John Romanides (1927–2001) on several matters—including their treatment of the Dionysian writings—serves as a notable example of thinkers having the same teacher, that is to say, Fr. Georges Florovsky (1893–1979), but producing work that followed distinct paths. It is also necessary to note that the Greek thinkers at times showed a somewhat free understanding of what it meant to be a disciple of these eminent Russian intellectuals. For instance, Nikolaos Matsoukas

(1934–2006) was not a direct student but an admirer of particular writings of Florovsky and considered himself a close disciple of the latter in an intellectual sense.<sup>1</sup> A similar tendency is evident with Yannaras: while he spent a few years as a student abroad under the guidance of native professors in Germany and France, he claimed that he was more influenced then by his personal encounter with the Russian theology and ecclesiastical experience in Paris. Yet, even in this case, this is an idiosyncratic connection given that the early Yannaras expressed his admiration of Vladimir Lossky's (1903–1958) synthesis, but he also assimilated a number of elements from the work of Florovsky.<sup>2</sup> The network of relationships becomes more complex if one takes into account that, among other Greek theologians who did the same, he combined that knowledge with his own contribution to the revival of Byzantine/post-Byzantine Orthodox culture in the Greek theology and scholarship of that time.

## The East/West Problem

Another difficulty with regard to the Greek scene is that several of the writings of that generation employed a more or less sharp contradistinction of what their authors conceived of as the 'East' and the 'West'. The present feature is often understood by scholars to constitute a form of anti-Western attitude insofar as in notable cases it sketched a pejorative image of the West as opposed to an idealized East that is presented as a radically different proposal and exalted for its culturally superior content. If this scheme is judged by more recent standards in the Greek scene, for instance progress in the study of sociology of religion, it would seem clear that it does have ideological content.<sup>3</sup> However, at least in Yannaras' early thought, the dichotomy between East and West was presented as a means of clarifying and establishing his stance following important existential experiences abroad. Moreover, his expression of a critical attitude vis-à-vis the West served as a way of dismissing popular views and religious practices in the Christian brotherhoods (or, as they are also called accurately in research, 'para-ecclesiastical organizations'), mainly Zoe and Sotir, which were incompatible with the inheritance he had discovered in particular patristic sources and their reception in medieval and modern Orthodox monastic tradition. Dionysius and his Orthodox reception were employed, among others, as the spearhead in his confrontation with that kind of theology which, for a number of younger theologians of the time, was in need of renewal.

However, the above point requires further explanation. A number of young theologians of the 1960s made use of the East–West scheme and their readers were on some occasions favourably disposed to that given the scholastic model of theology that some of their predecessors had espoused. However, even in this case, this statement is not entirely correct if one compares them with their theological peers who were not fond of that scheme and even objected to its use.<sup>4</sup> A hermeneutical difficulty a reader of Yannaras encounters is that the latter insists on that scheme in later phases of his intellectual development to date and correlates that with a broader Hellenocentric perspective,

which can be interpreted in various ways. If one considers that he often does not provide a precise definition of the concept of the West and also tends to adapt these ideas to various contexts, it would be proper to speak of many concepts of the West traceable in his work. The employment of these ideas in his interventions in social and political discussions—not infrequently in a critical tone—as a columnist in newspapers and public speaker in Greece has resulted in what one could describe as a distance between his authorial intentions and the broader reception of his work. Dionysius constitutes an ancient source invoked more or less directly in every phase of his thought and thus is subject to the above complexities. The earlier phase of Yannaras as an author was remarkable in this respect since it contributed to the further rise of local Dionysian scholarship and provoked a fertile debate about the place of Dionysian thought in the Greek Orthodox tradition.

## The Hagiographical Perspective in Modern Scholarship

A further viewpoint is that the lack of interest shown by some more recent Greek thinkers regarding the question of Dionysius' pseudonymity and thus also the intentions of the unknown author of these writings stems from their distance from the Western progress of research. However, it is worth considering this attitude on their part as the result of a deliberate choice to follow a different path as readers: a *hagiographical perspective*. There is no doubt that the well-known first-century Bishop of Athens holds a prominent place as a saint in the Orthodox tradition. It is also true that the later writings ascribed to him are often defended as authentic. For certain religious approaches, Dionysius is not an object of research but a figure revered for his testimony to their theory and practice: *insofar as* these writings include elements that reflect their own ascetic experience, they *are indeed* the product of his hand.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there were some Orthodox and Catholic scholars who defended the apostolicity of these writings before it was demonstrated by research that they belonged to a later author, while others from these traditions continued to do so afterwards.<sup>6</sup> However, the stance of Greek authors from the 1960s onwards is a different one: without disregarding the question of authorship, they pointed out the relevance of a hagiographical perspective in reading these works. In light of that, it is possible to identify the way in which this author situated himself within the Christian tradition and contributed to the hagiographical trends of his own time by filling a gap.

An example of a modern Orthodox thinker who was a prominent proponent of the apostolic character of these writings is Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993). It is clear that near the end of his life he presented a number of arguments for their intellectual kinship with an allegedly early Christian context. However, scholars rarely shed light on the cultural narrative in which he aimed them to be read. His attempt was not one intended for scholars in the strict sense but was pastoral. It should also be noted that it was part of his annotated translation of these writings, a main purpose of which was to popularize Dionysian thought for a broader readership. The revival of a theory of prayer as

it was developed in the Byzantine ascetic literature was a *desideratum* in his project of a paradigm shift in modern Romanian culture: his own Dionysius could be neither pagan nor liar. This is not an excuse for Stăniloae's arguments. However, it explains why he concluded by commenting that, even if the author was not in fact the disciple of Paul, he respected his practice of pseudonymity and estimated that the spiritual content of his writings could not deprive him of the title of saint.<sup>7</sup> This makes sense if one considers that the present cultural transfer by translation was published shortly after the completion of his translation of the *Philokalia* (1946–1991). In light of this, his approach shows some similarities with Hans Urs von Balthasar's (1905–1988) critique of a large part of the Western Dionysian scholarship known to him for its inability to grasp the patristic mind of this author and his refusal to attach the prefix 'pseudo-' to him because of its possible negative consequences for his correct interpretation.<sup>8</sup> A similar case from the Greek milieu could be Matsoukas, who pointed out that the question of authorship was not as important as it seemed given that this author managed to convert his pagan education into a dynamic Christian synthesis and also proved to be a mystical theologian himself through it.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore perhaps possible to speak of them as three versions of *ressourcement* in Orthodox and Catholic theology.

## Alternative Theological Receptions of Dionysius

A fourth view regarding the modern Greek reception of Dionysius is that it was more coherent in its positive perspective and did not have the clear disagreements that appeared in Russian émigré thought. It is probable that this estimation is based on the large influence of the local religious inheritance on aspects of Greek culture and the revival of Byzantine theology in scholarship, especially after the 1960s. A notable example is that of modern Greek literature, where one finds some authors invoking Dionysius and/or citing passages from his writings and imitating his sophisticated vocabulary. These include Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851–1911), Photis Kontoglou (1895–1965), and Nikos Gabriel Pentzikes (1908–1993).<sup>10</sup> However, if applied to academic theology, the above view is open to the argument that it does not distinguish between monastic cell and lecture hall.

A popular negative reading of this ancient author is found in one of the later writings of Panagiotis Trembelas (1886–1977).<sup>11</sup> He used pompous language to argue for the discontinuity between these writings and the authority of the Fathers. Except for the title of the text (*Διονύσιος ο Αρεοπαγίτης*), he constantly avoided references to him without the 'pseudo-' prefix and also provided a moralist critique of his pseudonymous authorship: this corpus of writings was fraudulent and its author a forger who could not be included in the holy Fathers. The patristic authors of the ancient Church never followed the practice of writing under pseudonymous identities because there was no need for it; Dionysius thus managed to mislead Byzantine theologians of his apostolic identity and establish himself in the Orthodox tradition. That was made possible thanks to the substantial revisions to many of his non-Orthodox formulations by the first scholiast who

was also misled. Trembelas suspected that the pseudonym was a means of protecting his heretical views and that it was revealing that Dionysius' writings were first used by the 'monophysites'. A further problem was that Trembelas considered that any form of Platonism was at odds with Scripture: if that philosophy was akin to a disease spreading through a healthy theology, it follows that Dionysius distorted Christianity through his use of Platonism as key elements of Dionysius' teaching were dependent on the Platonists and through him they were introduced into Christian literature. Some of them replaced fundamental biblical principles and thus he proved to be a philosopher rather than a theologian.

Most, if not all, of Trembelas' views outlined above could be refuted by recent and older research findings. However, it is important to notice his method: he *exclusively* cited patristic authors accepted for their orthodoxy by his university colleagues in Athens and secondary literature by scholars of the same confession. He rarely cited non-Orthodox bibliography and only when it agreed with the latter. Likewise, it is also known that he never studied outside Greece. It should be noted that he had a conviction of faithfulness to tradition and taught doctrine in academia. It is therefore possible to argue for a modern vision of the Orthodox past with no place for Dionysius. However, Trembelas was also a leading member of the Christian brotherhoods, which showed affinities with their Protestant counterparts. In light of this, one could justifiably pose the question of an imported agenda with regard to the organization of which he was a leading member. Two further examples are Stylianos Papadopoulos (1935–2012) and Megas Farandos (b. 1937).<sup>12</sup> Their points of departure were different: the first began his career as the author of two monographs on the reception of Thomism in Byzantium while the latter had strong ties with German systematic theology which were often evident in his publications. Their common denominator was the relation of scriptural revelation and Greek philosophy as two opposites; they identified Dionysius with the latter and viewed his work as a deviation from the Eastern patristic tradition. It is notable that all three were professors in disciplines associated with patristic literature at Athens. It seems that they had not read this author *in situ*. It is possible that they had developed their own visions of tradition and/or that they were opposed to particular receptions of Dionysius that they encountered either in Greece or in the European countries with which they were connected.

## THE TRANSITION FROM MONASTIC CELL TO LECTURE HALL

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It is possible to take for granted the current interest and emphasis on patristics in Greek scholarship, which to a great extent is the result of the prominent place of the Fathers in the local religious tradition. However, there have been a number of stages to the current state of research interest, which were connected with the social and political conditions

of the time. These played an important role in these developments in theology and Dionysian scholarship in Greece. Some of these factors will be analysed below to help us understand the wider context and nexus of influences that have or may have affected Dionysius as an object of study by the Greek theologians.

## German Education and Culture and the Greek Universities

For the first one hundred years after the establishment of the University of Athens (1837) in the newly founded Greek state (1830), the vast majority of those who served as professors of theological disciplines there had been previously educated in German academic institutions. There were particular universities in which young Greek students and researchers specialized. A smaller number of them had been educated primarily or exclusively in Russia,<sup>13</sup> though this did not lead them to avoid scholastic influences and Western lenses of interpretation, which they introduced to the Greek scene. It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine whether they chose to learn theology in Germany on account of better funding opportunities or guidance by the political state of Greece (i.e. the German kingship). However, this is a connection that points to a certain influence on how theological scholarship was understood in the context of the national institution for higher education in Greece. The question of their discipleship is an open issue given that it demands comparative literature which has not developed yet. Certain questions arise: was that limited to the use of foreign bibliography, which was hard to find in their country? Did these professional theologians adopt specific research methods from their German advisers? Did they follow particular modern trends to understand their tradition? In what way was each of them a critical user of what he had received? A similar issue is found with the division of the sectors and the first curricula of the theology department which were also based on German models.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that after the 1930s several theologians interested in pursuing a career in academia chose to follow the same destination. Two of the most distinctive readers of Dionysius through hagiographical lenses after the 1960s, Matsoukas and Yannaras, similarly spent time there for postgraduate research.

A representative example of a scholar connected with the above context is Nikolaos Louvaris (1887–1961): he specialized at a German university; his writings abound with references to relative bibliography and he also translated notable books from the same context aimed at students and a broader readership. German intellectuals of the time were tied by bonds of friendship with him and an admiration of German art and culture is evident from his writings. He preferred idealism as a lens through which to approach the history of Christian thought, and he initiated the creation of a new chair at Athens inspired by similar German ones.<sup>15</sup> While these elements require comparative analysis, they are sufficient to show the relationship between the two contexts in his case. With respect to the faculty members who were trained in Russia, one could provide the example of Gregorios Papamichael (1875–1956). He was the author of a number



of pioneering studies from a historical perspective about the hesychast controversy, but he also authored an article and later a treatise in defence of the practice of proofs for the existence of God as part of Christian apologetics.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that even after the 1960s some professors incited their students who were interested in patristic studies to attain experience in Germany as a good foundation for the development of their methodology as future researchers.<sup>17</sup> The School of Theology at Thessaloniki was founded in 1925 and began to operate later in 1942. Its educational structure was similarly inspired by European models. Yet some intellectuals claim that patristic studies (and neo-patristic theology) were affected greatly by the cultural circumstances of that city and the gradual flourishing of the monastic community of Mount Athos since the late 1950s or thereabouts.<sup>18</sup> It is perhaps no accident that the first two doctoral theses in Greece on Dionysius were submitted there in the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> It is also important that younger theologians from Athens and Thessaloniki became acquainted with the scholarly work of the Russian émigrés, particularly after the 1960s; this provided an impetus to their research on the Fathers and their interest was passed on to their own students.

## Theological Authority in the Public Sphere

A further element that relates to the reception of Dionysius in modern Greece is the conception of theological knowledge in the public sphere and the role of specific social foundations beyond the lecture hall. One example could be the catechetical activity of the Christian brotherhoods which constituted a religious movement that attempted to achieve a number of aims in the past, including to enlighten Greek citizens on religious matters and also to provide social care.<sup>20</sup> It has been argued that in specific periods their initiatives were determined either evidently or implicitly by an agenda as to what their leading members considered suitable for the spiritual formation of these citizens as Greek Christians. It is true that since the 1940s the Zoe organization began to be more powerful and to intensify its publishing activity, producing material intended for a broader readership.<sup>21</sup> It has been stated in this regard that the theological education provided by the brotherhood at the time included an emphasis on Scripture over the study of the Fathers (as the latter were valued as interpreters of the scriptural text and not as living theological voices), as well as the avoidance of references to the ascetic tradition in their publications.<sup>22</sup>

That becomes clearer if one examines Trembelas' voluminous series of commentaries to almost all the books of the New Testament (1937–1956), which are accepted by the Orthodox Church: *rarely* does one find references to the ascetic literature and *never* to Dionysius. Below the original texts and his own paraphrases he put extensive verse-by-verse footnotes, which incorporated opinions of ancient Christian authors and modern scholars. He stated repeatedly in his introductions that he employed mostly Protestant bibliography as a guide to the patristic sources, but also that the selections and additions to them were based on his own criteria.<sup>23</sup> Could the exclusion of Dionysius be a deliberate choice? In the same introductions he devoted a great deal of space to refute



specific hypotheses of authorship of scriptural texts one by one, as well as to demonstrate the intellectual kinship of these texts with the rest of biblical canon and/or their use by early Christians in a clearly apologetic vein.<sup>24</sup> This defence could point to one of the reasons he does not include Dionysius and other authors of Christian apocrypha. It could be argued that scholars had not approached Dionysius as a reader of Scripture by that time but there were already notable theological studies that understood the Dionysian writings as an important chapter in the Eastern patristic tradition, as well as histories of philosophy which made positive assessments of his Christian synthesis by Greek authors. The purpose of this attitude to Dionysius cannot be known with certainty. However, these important commentaries were popular and widely used by clergy and lay theologians in parishes and secondary schools in Greece.

An example that could be added here is the social authority of the professors of theology and the graduates of their departments, leading at times to competition between professional theologians and representatives of the Church as to who was better qualified to engage in theological discourse in the public sphere. This can also be observed in the context of the study of Dionysius. For instance, in the interwar period two erudite clergymen engaged in arguments on scholarly problems with lay professors from the university at Athens. One was Athenagoras Eleutheriou (1869–1944), Metropolitan of Paramythia and Parga by then, who made a number of hypotheses about the identity and the intellectual milieu of the author of the Dionysian writings and developed a discussion with Demetrios Balanos (1877–1959), Professor of Patristics. The other was Archimandrite Emmanouel Karpathios (1888–1972), later elected Metropolitan of Kos, who showed a detailed interest in the mysterious man that the author of these writings presents as his mentor and proceeded to make some propositions for identifying the works ascribed to him by the latter. Karpathios' views gave rise to his debate with Konstantinos Dyovouniotes (1872–1943), Professor of Doctrine and Ethics. It should be remarked that in both of these cases the ecclesiastical theologians employed a historical and philological methodology. This manifests their intention of covering the standards of theology as it was cultivated in the lecture hall: *als Wissenschaft*. At least in one instance from his response to Dyovouniotes' review of his propositions, Karpathios claimed that his judge took advantage of his authority over their discussion on a scholarly level,<sup>25</sup> perhaps pointing to the competition mentioned earlier. It can be inferred from these that Greek Dionysian researchers are not from a purely academic background. Moreover, their interaction is influenced by aspects of modern Greek social history and culture, for example, the ideological controversy outlined earlier.

## The Cultural Identity of Modern Athens

A third feature is that the cult of St Dionysius the Areopagite in its current form in the city of Athens did not develop from one moment to the next. One can observe numerous contributions of ecclesiastical figures and academic theologians in the development of this cult from the first decades after the establishment of the state of Greece. They

attempted to make the disciple of Paul more popular to the citizens of Athens, which had become the Greek capital in 1834. In doing so, they brought the writings ascribed to Dionysius to the fore and made their theology and reception in Orthodox hagiography more widely known. These include the edited republications of the prayer and the troparia for St Dionysius (which had been collated or composed by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, 1749-1809) for ecclesiastical use by publishers based in Athens, public speeches of professors of theology for the historical relevance of the saint on the occasion of the celebration of his feast there, and the collaboration between religious leaders and the city council for building churches dedicated to him as the patron of the Greek capital.<sup>26</sup> In one of these speeches a professor who later became priest and subsequently a metropolitan, Themistocles Vimpos (1832-1903), went on to liken Dionysius' feast to the spiritual birthday of the city and concluded his speech with an appeal to the Mayor of Athens and the Minister of Religious Affairs and Education for the creation of a cathedral dedicated to the saint. It is worth noting that in the same year the Greek Catholics had inaugurated their cathedral for him as their patron (1865) and that was something highlighted by the speaker.<sup>27</sup> It is possible that he understood this cult as a contribution to Greek identity as similar views can be found in other speeches of this kind.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the Orthodox cathedral was inaugurated a little more than two decades later (1887). It can be argued that the erection of an Orthodox cathedral in 1931 to replace the first and the official proclamation of Dionysius as the patron of Athens by kingly edict in 1936 were milestones in Dionysius' rise to prominence in Athens.<sup>29</sup> These historical events were important because in certain cases the retrieval of this religious devotion functioned as a source of inspiration for artists and writers as well as for scholars in Athens and elsewhere.

### THREE MODERN GREEK READINGS OF DIONYSIUS

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Following the above examination of the Greek scene and some of the external factors interwoven with the study of Dionysius, I will concentrate on three readers from the interwar and the postwar periods: Emmanouel Karpathios, Christos Yannaras, and John Zizioulas. All of these engaged with the Dionysian writings but each of them followed a different approach due to the methods they employed and the context in which they aimed their work to be read. The first neither held an academic position nor studied in the West as the other two did. However, he practised theology in a stricter scientific sense than the other two. The two readers from the generation of the 1960s are selected to be examined here because in a number of instances they show an understanding of theology as a modern synthesis which is inspired by and extends the Fathers, creating a *neopatristic synthesis*, although their publications were presented in different contexts and also showed different handlings of the Dionysian author. Thus, further to

the analysis that forms the basis of this part of the essay, it becomes evident how theological scholarship shifted from one methodology to another and also that, even when scholars adopt a similar method, their lenses of interpretation can vary considerably.

## EMMANOUEL KARPATHIOS

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In a series of complementary research articles and an essay published in an encyclopaedia Karpathios constructed an intriguing hypothesis about the historical background of the person mentioned in the Dionysian writings as the mentor of the author and also the two treatises ascribed to him in the same source.<sup>30</sup> A summary of his theory is as follows: Hierotheus really existed and was a Christian Father of the apostolic or post-apostolic era. Dionysius did not invent the above person and the extracts that he quoted from his writings were parts of his mentor's authorial activity. These two are demonstrable if one investigates carefully the historical information provided by the sixth-century unknown author and compares it with specific later Byzantine references to his writings. Finally, Karpathios argued that two hagiographical extracts under his name which he had distinguished from similar ones were a lost piece of text from the body of the *Epistle to Diognetus* and subsequently ascribed the latter to Hierotheus. Thus, he concluded that the testimony of the *Menologion of Basil II* could include objective historical elements about the life and work of the mentor of Dionysius. It is true that the last two propositions may not be able to convince scholars if assessed by recent and older standards in research. However, Karpathios made a number of remarks about the way scholars should interpret the writings of Dionysius and understand Byzantine hagiographical literature in general which remain useful.

One worthwhile argument proposed by Karpathios is that, given that the principal source for Hierotheus' existence was an author who employed the name of a biblical figure as his pseudonym, Dionysius would have felt the need to use valid historical information about the early Church in his writings to be persuasive to his readers. Karpathios estimated that Dionysius was a Christian author who showed a profound knowledge of ancient Christian literature and even that he must have spent considerable time in Athens conducting fieldwork as a student of its ecclesiastical background and collector of details about Hierotheus.<sup>31</sup> Another point he made was that the absence of apparent traces of the writings of Dionysius' alleged mentor can be explained by Dionysius' tendency to modify his Christian sources to protect his staged narrative. Karpathios also speculated that the form in which these writings appear suggests that Hierotheus did not compose self-contained treatises but possibly religious thoughts which were circulated as concise texts.<sup>32</sup> A further aspect of his theory was his response to the scholars who considered Dionysius dependent on the so-called *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*: he believed the opposite to be more reasonable given that Syriac authors typically used to adopt information from Greek Christian literature. He even proposed that these two accounts for Hierotheus could be independent of one other and derived their material from one or more early Christian sources.<sup>33</sup> Lastly, he pointed out that the

practice of playing with the names of revered persons and saints in Greek hagiographical texts was common and therefore the handling of his name by Dionysius and later Byzantine hagiographers were not enough to indicate that he was a fictional persona or even an allusion to a biblical or patristic figure.<sup>34</sup>

It should be expected that not all of the above views are without problems, but they do have some advantages. His response to other scholarly theories of the time to demonstrate the historical existence of Hierotheus and the credibility of specific details that derive from his portrait as a saint in the Byzantine literature are valuable in that they seem to offer a foretaste of later trends in Dionysian scholarship. One aspect of these could be the connection of the sixth-century author with the Christian sources that inform us about the first structures of the Church. The correlation of Dionysius with the *Diognetus* epistle is a hypothesis that could be viewed in this light. In recent years researchers tend to read Dionysius as a conscious user of literature of this kind, who constructed his own account of the person he purported to be. A useful insight can also be found in Karpathios' proposal that Dionysius did modify his sources to protect the use of the pseudonym. In this way he explained the reason modern readers had failed to identify the Hierothean extracts quoted by the alleged disciple up to his time. This is an important perspective given that one can find later studies that attempt to demonstrate this practice on the part of Dionysius. Further to this, there are studies that attempt to understand Hierotheus as an epithet which alludes to specific Christian authors and to view his supposed writings as their own. It is also remarkable that Karpathios did not endorse the idea that Dionysius was influenced by the *Book of the Holy Hierotheus*; rather, he hypothesized that the latter could have been dependent on the former or even that they were separate accounts. More recent scholarship treats these independently and/or views the latter as a corpus amended by interpolations. Karpathios' use of Byzantine theology as a framework for his hypotheses should also be estimated positively because it led him to see in Dionysius a consciously Christian author who was not a forger. This aspect is valuable given that sometimes the discovery of further possible resemblances between Dionysius and late antique philosophers by later scholars made them more sceptical about Dionysius' intentions and led them to project this scepticism on to Hierotheus, whom they understood as an indirect reference to particular pagan Platonists.

If Karpathios is judged as a Dionysian scholar, it is fair to argue that some of his views were pioneering for the standards of their time. One of these could be the reversal of the relationship between Dionysius and the *Hierotheus* book. Rarely, if ever, had it been proposed before Karpathios that Dionysius could be the source. Karpathios also showed notable academic virtues in his work. These include his diligence in spending time on Mount Athos for his fieldwork: he visited several monasteries to search for manuscripts that would contain references to his object of study and, if possible, even the works of Hierotheus themselves. He also became familiar with relics ascribed to Hierotheus there.<sup>35</sup> Another quality is the erudition found in his publications: he used a large number of studies in both Greek and other languages and was aware of a few details of the cult of the saint in the West.<sup>36</sup> He also developed doubt as a principle for his research: in his response to Dyovouniotes' arguments against his project he stated that it is necessary to make speculations in an area of study before new evidence can

offer definitive answers, instead of adopting what Western research dictates unquestioningly.<sup>37</sup> These features of his research have greater value if one considers that he was a priest and not an academic, suggesting that he is likely to have lacked the connections with European academic networks of his contemporaries in the universities. The unfavourable financial conditions for many Greeks of the time and the unstable political context would be further obstacles for his research. One example is the encyclopaedia in which Karpathios' paper was published: it was not completed because of these and other reasons and it would be three decades before it was replaced in Greek bibliography.<sup>38</sup> It is unfortunate that he is not widely known among more recent students of Dionysius as he authored a greater number of publications on the above topic than any other scholar before him and his attempts also predate classic articles in the Anglophone world.<sup>39</sup>

A greater understanding of Karpathios' project can be achieved if one takes into account his identity as an Orthodox theologian. It is possible that his defence of the details provided by Dionysius for his alleged mentor was motivated by an apologetic agenda. It is surely not coincidental that his papers frequently include responses to the arguments of Georgios Dervos (1854–1925) against the existence of a historical person named Hierotheus before Dionysius.<sup>40</sup> The latter was Professor of Patristics and Christian Archaeology in Athens and it could be that Karpathios saw in the hypothesis of his approach an authoritative voice in the Greek capital which had put the religious tradition in question. Could their disagreement have reflected the problem of tradition and modernity in the Greek scene? Karpathios was aware of the debates about the pseudonymous character of the Dionysian writings and the suspicions they provoked among scholars about the author's intentions. His principle was to shift their attention from the *name of the author* to the *traditional contents* of what he wrote. The references to this allegedly apostolic teacher were valuable in this regard. Karpathios' practice was not unfamiliar to the Greek theologians of the 1920s who tackled the problem of the relationship between myth and reason: some of those who were interested in Christian apologetics had composed treatises about the historicity of Jesus and even defended the antiquity of given religious practices.<sup>41</sup> Karpathios' efforts could likewise be viewed in light of individual and collective initiatives to support the place of Dionysius as a saint in Athens. These contributed to the revival of the devotion to his alleged mentor according to tradition and include various activities, for example, the edited republications by Athenian publishers of a prayer, the troparia for St Hierotheus, and the *Encomium*, which is attributed to Euthymius Zigabenus.<sup>42</sup> A further example is the erection of a church for the saint and the resettlement of the homonymous Byzantine monastery in the Attica region in the same year (1930).<sup>43</sup> It is possible that Karpathios' defence was related to these developments.

## THE GENERATION OF THE 1960S

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A change of scenery with reference to the method of theological enterprise and its relation to Western lenses of interpretation began to be observed after the 1960s in Greece.

This historical shift has been articulated by different authors in their own words.<sup>44</sup> Representatives of this generation began to be more familiar with existential philosophy and ontological hermeneutics as well as with analytic philosophy as they were developed in Europe and had also been employed by some of their Greek philosophical and theological predecessors. A particularly important impetus was provided to them both by the intellectual inheritance of the Russian émigré Orthodox thinkers and by the growing number of editions of the works of the Fathers in other European countries since the 1940s. Their interest turned to many new topics and in particular cases the means they found in the above philosophical currents facilitated their efforts to prepare historical and theological monographs on Greek patristic authors. At other times they employed the same means to elaborate on contemporary issues and the concept of tradition in their personal syntheses. Some of the topics that became the subject of broader discussions in the Greek scene were: the Eucharistic foundations of the Church; the doctrine of deification in Byzantine theology; the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies; the apophatic knowledge of God by humans; and what was launched as the theology of personhood. Two of the principal figures of this group of theologians were Christos Yannaras and John Zizioulas: both of them graduated from the same faculty of theology and then pursued studies abroad where they obtained first-hand knowledge of Russian émigré thought and developed personal relationships with some of its representatives and their ecclesiastical circles. However, the personal experiences of each of the two, the agendas of their work on systematic theology, and the contexts in which they aimed to find readers determined their points of view on a number of subjects. One of these is their handling of the author of the Dionysian corpus.

## CHRISTOS YANNARAS

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Few, if any, representatives of the generation of the 1960s have made greater use of Dionysius than Yannaras: the presence of the ancient author is evident in various forms in Yannaras' writings, from his earliest to his more recent publications. This relationship manifests itself in three ways. One is in direct references to the author by name and/or citations of or quotations from his writings. Another is the tendency of the Greek theologian to draw inspiration from this ancient source and/or to provide extensions to it through the use of continental and analytic philosophy and, at other times, Byzantine theology. A third way is the resemblances between the two authors, given that Yannaras' objective of responding to what he understood as the Westernized character of the academic theology and religious life in Greek society included a number of elements shared with ancient Christian thought. The difference between the second and third ways is sometimes hardly discernible. One example of the reception of Dionysius could be the three purely theological books of the early phase of the Greek theologian (1967–1970): all of these include references to the Dionysian writings while two of these include additional references in their revised and expanded versions published after several years.<sup>45</sup> His later works also include references to Dionysius. A prominent example is



found in his philosophy of language: not only does he frequently refer to and quote from Dionysius but in some cases he tends to employ themes of analytic philosophy, understanding them in a personal manner to elaborate on the ancient author or, alternatively, using aspects from both of these as a means of developing his own ideas.<sup>46</sup> That he was inspired by Dionysius is evident also from the purely theological writings of more recent phases of his thought. A characteristic example is a text on the service of the Eucharist that he composed anonymously: both the practice of anonymity and its vocabulary suggest his debt to Dionysius—at least the latter seems quite clear.<sup>47</sup> These would appear to point to a lasting connection between the two.

The similar ideas and practices in Yannaras and Dionysius are so many that they are able to provide the ground for different comparative approaches by modern scholars. One is that both authors are indebted to a school of thought or even an institution that they do not acknowledge explicitly: for the former this is his academic education at the Athens University Faculty of Theology, while for the latter it is his relationship to late Platonism and perhaps also to the Academy of Athens. Another similarity is that both acknowledge their debt to an inspired mentor who is described as a Socrates-like figure and is active outside their own intellectual milieu: for Yannaras this figure is Demetrios Koutroumbis (1921–1983) while for Dionysius it is someone called ‘Hierotheus’. In both cases their profiles are sketched in a lively manner but the details found in other sources are limited: even Koutroumbis was not particularly well-known outside the inner circle of Yannaras and some other theologians and certainly not as recognizable as the academic teachers of that time.<sup>48</sup> A further parallel is the practice of anonymity: this is a point shared not only with postmodern authors but also with Dionysius who used pseudonyms. It is remarkable that Koutroumbis also used to employ pseudonyms in his written work; here, we see two pseudonymous disciple–mentor pairs. One could add their shared passion for language and their ability to create new vocabulary; they are interested in what is meant by linguistic structures. On the one hand, language facilitated the deviation from what the author understood as the ideological principles of his earlier theological education and religious formation in two institutions, the university and the brotherhoods. On the other hand, many scholars contend that one of the reasons Dionysius gave such prominence to language was to deconstruct the philosophical language of late Platonism or even some late antique extensions to Origen. In both cases their *meta*-languages provided an impetus to the theological output that followed: Greek theology of the 1970s to 1990s and the later Byzantine teachings of the Church. A last note: whether influenced by Dionysius or by modern thought, the Greek theologian often uses almost identical formulations with the Byzantine thinker to expose his views on particular issues which include the nature of theology and critique of political life.<sup>49</sup>

Yannaras’ particular interest in Dionysius is shown most clearly in his monograph on Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Dionysius published more than five decades ago. A summary of its argument is that the German philosopher shaped the view that Western metaphysics (as developed by the scholastic theologians and passed on to later Western thought and culture) was responsible for the rise of nihilistic atheism



to which it led. The same marks of this critical state of affairs in Western theology had been diagnosed earlier by the prophetic voice of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). The principal reason for this was the method followed by important representatives of the Western Churches to produce theology—a method that was closely related to that of philosophical Platonism. Its origins can be found in the ideas of Augustine, which were systematized later by the scholastics and through them bequeathed to a number of enlightened philosophers in Western Europe. Their method turned God into an object of the human intellect whose existence can be either demonstrated or disputed by reason and thus paved the way for conceptual constructions of God. The response to that is to be found in the theory of knowledge developed by the Byzantine Orthodox tradition; Dionysius' thought was a milestone in the evolution of its doctrine. A few passages from Dionysius' writings manifest a different approach to God, that of *apophatic theology*. The same epistemological method is found in earlier and later Byzantine theologians. This is different from the Western approaches to God in that it is based on the distinction between the essence and the energies of God. The last principle turns God into a subject that is active and thus enables humans, too, to be active and participate in him. For the Eastern Fathers, God is a personal being who builds a relationship with his creatures. If the divine is participated it follows that the nature of theological language can be primarily symbolic and not demonstrative: the point of departure is divine revelation and not human intellectual capacities, as is argued in Western theology. Their positions are influenced by Aristotle in that they employed the latter to modify Platonism and thus retained the true content of Greek philosophy since Heraclitus.<sup>50</sup> They managed to develop the concept of the participation in the life of community, as is evident in writings of Fathers from the Cappadocians to Gregory Palamas.

The above views were extended in Yannaras' subsequent publications, while some of his later ideas were used to revise the monograph in question in its expanded form. A few aspects of that narrative have provoked questions among scholars and have been the subject of justifiable critique. These include the theological treatment of Heidegger and the theory of decline of the West, as well as the polemical language used to describe the stages of the deviation of the West from the East.<sup>51</sup> In the later phases of the author's thought, these views became more generalized and in particular cases were absorbed into his political perspective. One example is his view that Western theology before the scholastics had already developed a metaphysics that was incompatible not only with given aspects of Byzantine theology but also with a kind of theology in the East that went back to the apostolic period. Another is his estimation that the metaphysics of the West, which had begun to dominate in the East since the late Byzantine period, had in his time become the rule and thus he suggested that local intellectuals should develop a *Greek* reading of the ancient sources to preserve their identity.<sup>52</sup> These and other aspects of this theological narrative raise further questions. However, it is possible to read this attitude in light of alternative perspectives. A first response could be to consider the author himself a *person* whose hypostatic features include specific intellectual virtues and prejudices, but even so that would not comply with the standards posed by a scholarly engagement with these views. However, it is true that a biographical story lies behind the

pages of this work—and behind his other writings—that could shed light on his agenda and some of its early readings.

The preface added to the expanded edition of the monograph gives a clue as to this story. There it is stated by the author that his attempt to investigate the concept of apophatic theology in the Eastern tradition was not positively received by two of his more conservative professors from Athens.<sup>53</sup> Some of their reservations may have been justifiable as that attempt popularized a different method of production of theology and also presented a number of ideas that were clarified in some of his subsequent writings. The scepticism of individuals who were members of the brotherhoods was acknowledged by the translator of the popular monograph of Lossky on the mystical theology of the Eastern Christian tradition in an interview recently broadcast on religious radio in Greece. Their reservations centred on the topic and the authority of Dionysius, as well as the fact that it was a woman who carried out the translation.<sup>54</sup> The above two professors were influential members of the brotherhoods, raising the question of whether these two books introduced a type of theology that was different to that established in Greece at the time. It cannot be known with certainty if the primary intention of *Heidegger and the Areopagite* was to respond to the agenda of these intellectuals from the brotherhoods. However, it certainly served that purpose. The author composed it after he had left the brotherhood to which he belonged and while he was a researcher at a German academic institution (1964–1967). In the intellectual autobiography he published subsequently, the Greek theologian stated that it was there he discovered the affinities between the structures of the brotherhood and religious life in the West.<sup>55</sup> It is therefore possible that his monograph opposed not only the West but also the Westernized East. In this respect it is revealing to compare an article outlining Trembelas' career, written by one of the later theologians, where it is noted several times within the presentation of his work that Trembelas was so cultivated that he did not need to go to the West for studies or research.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the West was treated as an epistemological category in a debate over tradition and modernity.

It would be useful to note that between the first and second editions of the book a number of elements changed but the dedication to his mother did not. That can prove meaningful if it is understood in light of the preface to the expanded (second) edition of the above monograph because motherhood constitutes a key topic in all phases of the author's work used to describe the experiential side of truth.<sup>57</sup> The dedication could therefore be read as being in opposition to the above preface. In this way, it is possible to trace two pairs of opposed realities in the book: mother–academia/Eastern theology–Western metaphysics. The broader perspective could be the rationalist approaches to God in Western metaphysics as opposed to the experiential knowledge of God in Eastern theology. The narrow perspective could be the model of theology of some of the professors at the Greek university as opposed to the knowledge acquired by the author from his relationship with his mother, with the second pair arguably representing the difference between an impersonal and standardized kind of knowledge and one that is personal and based on selfless love. This perhaps also reflects the problem of technique and nature that was of interest to the Greek philosophers and theologians of the 1950s and 1960s. This is possible if one considers that in the first edition the author

cited three notable authors who had examined this issue before.<sup>58</sup> Another early monograph formed a critique of pietistic morality as he understood it. In the latest edition of this work he defined the first edition of the book as an autobiographical testimony,<sup>59</sup> suggesting that it was a critique of the moral formation he had received in the brotherhood of his youth. In a similar vein, it is possible to argue that *Heidegger and the Areopagite* was partly a critique of the institution in which he had been educated.

Dionysius could be of help here. In a little-known text composed shortly after the monograph on the apophatic method, the Greek theologian described how he experienced the activities of the brotherhood both as a member and after he left and moved to the West.<sup>60</sup> That text was of remarkable literary value and its title was the same as the book-length testimony on the same topic that he published almost two decades later. One feature was that it employed various terms that were already or subsequently paired to form the titles of books which were related in one way or another to the above topic.<sup>61</sup> Another feature is that, unlike other contemporary texts, it bears a strange dedication 'Τοῦ Εὐσεβίου'. Judging from the contents of the text, it would be reasonable to think that this proper name referred to Archimandrite Eusebius Matthopoulos (1849–1929), the founder of the religious institution to which the author devoted his youth. It should be noted that his name is mentioned in the genitive case. This could denote that he was the creator of the situation that the author went through or of the institution itself. However, it also signifies the distinctive property of that man: his piety. It could be interpreted as the 'one who was pious'. One of the greatest accusations levelled by the Greek theologian at the brotherhoods was their role in the diffusion throughout Greece of what he perceived as pietism. Many details of this were later provided in his testimony.<sup>62</sup> The playful language of the text and its rich vocabulary make one suspect that it could not have been inherited from the serious teachers of these institutions. Nor had he started to concentrate on the philosophy of language systematically in that period. However, he had published the monograph about Dionysius and later in his career he drew on the latter to launch an alternative liturgical language. It could be that, as the ancient author played with the proper name of the alleged recipient of his works, the modern author followed a similar practice with his own recipient, using Eusebius' name to respond to his disciples and followers in the brotherhood.

How did the monograph contribute to Dionysian studies in Greece? There are two possible ways of viewing its significance. One is that the modern author made Dionysius and the apophatic method more well-known to the local readership and that he initiated discussions about topics related to these. The other is that he maintained a positive assessment of this ancient source as part of the tradition of the Fathers. If a good book is one that provokes debate and provides an impetus to research, then Yannaras' monograph can be considered as such. It is certain that its author was not alone in attempting to investigate the above epistemological topic; there were already some theologians who had engaged with it, but not to the same extent. It is also true that one of the philosophers who had examined the present topic extensively had not shown a specialized interest in Dionysius or written a self-contained publication about him but approached him as part of a broader historical perspective.<sup>63</sup> One of the merits of Yannaras' work is that it

became a point of reference for theological discussions that went beyond the confines of the university. In the first years after its publication references or responses to the work are not found exclusively in the work of academic theologians but also in non-academic authors who were interested in its hagiographical perspective.<sup>64</sup> Another merit is that it contributed to the fields of systematic theology and Dionysian studies in the university. That is evident from a specialized interest in apophatic theology that followed and the first doctoral theses about Dionysius in Greek, both of which acknowledged the contribution of Yannaras' work.<sup>65</sup>

A remarkable contribution of the monograph can be found in the field of theological hermeneutics in that it aimed to provide a coherent interpretation of a source that was important for the Orthodox tradition. It should be noted that it was the first time in the Greek bibliography that Dionysius' name appeared in the title of a theological monograph. The fact that it was an interpretative and not a historical reading adds to the value of the project. There were a few chapters authored by Greek scholars about Dionysius in handbooks of history of philosophy and patristic literature between the 1930s and the 1960s which provided positive assessments of his thought. They developed useful summaries of his teachings but did not proceed to an extensive analysis of his arguments.<sup>66</sup> The opinion of one academic theologian of the period is relevant here: Dionysius was fond of a cryptic language that was incomprehensible as it was marked by an unusual vocabulary and sophisticated intellectual structures.<sup>67</sup> The hagiographical viewpoint of the book could be a merit in itself as there were differing estimations in the Greek bibliography of the place of Dionysius in tradition. Two of these concerned the question of whether Dionysius was as influential in the Byzantine tradition as in Western theology.<sup>68</sup>

Two questions about the treatment of Dionysius arise here. Firstly, why does a Father of the Orthodox tradition necessarily have to be compatible with the premises of the metaphysics of Gregory Palamas? The comprehension of the concept of tradition in Yannaras may be somewhat static, as was seen earlier in the case of Trembelas: the one presupposed the essence–energies distinction while the other the use of Scripture. One could respond that it is not necessary to find these in the form they were developed in earlier or later Greek Fathers to consider Dionysius a theologian since that would undermine the ability of the ancient author to produce tradition himself. Secondly, why was Dionysius to be understood as opposed to the Western Christian traditions? One could argue that there were other kinds of apophatic theology, as well as an exchange of ideas between East and West from ancient Christian times, which would not allow for them to be treated as two opposite worlds. Yannaras' tendency to follow the above scheme would not agree with the theological principles espoused by Dionysius himself, who was protective of the unity of the Christian community and polemical only to teachers of false knowledge outside that.<sup>69</sup> Many scholars claim a Syrian identity for him. It should be noted that in that theological milieu, too, there were voices that attempted to protect the unity of the Christians who did not share the same beliefs.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Dionysius did not touch openly on doctrinal issues that would provoke conflicts. That points to a possible distinction between the ancient author and his modern reader.

## JOHN ZIZIOULAS

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A good way to investigate how Zizioulas, the other Greek theologian of the generation of the 1960s, handled the writings of Dionysius would be to consider the point of departure of his research as well as some of the possible influences on his thought. His route as a student of theology was different from that of Yannaras examined above: he moved to the United States and not to Western Europe for postgraduate research, while he also came to know trends in Russian émigré thought that were developed in that intellectual context. After two stays and many years of research there he returned to Greece and submitted a doctoral thesis about the structures of the early Church at the University of Athens, where he also worked for a short period before he began his professional career in the Anglophone world. It should be noted here that in the same period he also began to take part in activities of the ecumenical movement and to publish in theological journals and volumes with an inter-confessional interest.<sup>71</sup> The monograph that grew out of the above thesis could be helpful in understanding Zizioulas' viewpoint and his interests in the early stages of his authorial activity. In the preface to both the first and second editions he pointed out that its purpose was to meet the requirements of a scholarly approach to the topic and to serve the needs of contemporary theology for understanding the nature of the Church and aspects of its development.<sup>72</sup> These could make sense if one considers that most of the theses at the Athens Faculty of Theology in the 1950s and 1960s adopted a historical methodology. There were also a number of initiatives for the promotion of the ecumenical movement and trends for renewal in Western theologies in the same period.<sup>73</sup> Zizioulas' monograph focused on the Eucharistic foundations and the office of the Church from apostolic times to the period prior to the first ecumenical council. It is possible that he aimed to present the results of a study that would be of interest to other Christian traditions. This would be confirmed by the references to a number of theologians involved in the above changes for Western theology, as well as by the publications that followed the monograph.

What about the influences on Zizioulas' thought? In a detailed account of his studies and route as an intellectual written at a late stage of his career, he mentioned a few Western theologians who influenced his thought when he was a young researcher in the United States. One of them was Florovsky, the Russian émigré ecclesiastical historian,<sup>74</sup> whose impact is also evident from the reference to him in the preface and in the footnotes of the above monograph. Thus, one could speak of a different point of departure from Yannaras. One example could be that Zizioulas referred to several Russian émigré thinkers who had engaged with Eucharistic theology and ecclesiology before his monograph. Most of them had migrated to the United States by the time he arrived there. In his book chapters and articles in the same theological disciplines he made numerous references to the same thinkers. However, in his monograph he did not refer to Lossky and in his other studies (i.e. chapters and articles) he made only a few references to the latter, all of them critical.<sup>75</sup> His first reference to Lossky as a voice of modern religious

thought in an ecclesiological study appeared almost a decade after the publication of his monograph. In contrast, Yannaras gave a prominent place to Lossky in his monograph on Dionysius and apophatic theology: in his references to non-Greek Orthodox thinkers he cited the above Russian thinker almost exclusively. Similarly, Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882–1957), whose work showed affinities with that of Lossky, is absent from Zizioulas' writings but was viewed positively in the early thought of Yannaras.<sup>76</sup> The first two explicit references by Zizioulas to Dionysius are found after the early 1970s,<sup>77</sup> perhaps indicating that he approached him through the above principles as an interpreter.

The fact that Zizioulas had already developed an agenda which he adapted to Dionysius becomes clear if some of the themes of his early work are compared with Yannaras' monograph. One example is the principles of the essence–energies distinction and the ecstatic character of the relationship between God and humans. These are themes found in Yannaras' monograph but not in the early work of Zizioulas. Even when Zizioulas engaged with them and their relation with Dionysius from the late 1970s onwards, his own treatment was not as extensive as that of the other Greek theologian from the generation of the 1960s (i.e. Yannaras). It could be that he aimed to develop a different agenda as to the theoretical extensions he provided to the patristic tradition. That could become apparent if one considers that he made specific critical remarks about some views of modern Orthodox theologians on the metaphysics and the ecclesiastical practice of Gregory Palamas which he understood as dangerous: first, their treatment of the above distinction in a way that in his view undermined the foundation of the Incarnation for that; and second, their tendency to understand the Greek Father as a monastic figure in a way that could be a problem as regards his identity as Eucharistic theologian.<sup>78</sup> One cannot be sure about the recipients of these remarks. However, both criticisms appeared in the writings that followed his return to Greece to take up a position at the University of Thessaloniki (i.e. from 1984 onwards). It is possible that he opposed particular academics there and/or their disciples who were already authors of studies on Dionysius. It should also be noted that some theologians at the University of Thessaloniki were favourably disposed to the theological views of Lossky and other theologians from the Russian community of Paris, whereas Zizioulas had already expressed some reservations in his earlier publications about the neopatristic vision of the above Russian thinker for the same reasons.<sup>79</sup> This perhaps suggests that Zizioulas aimed to follow the example of what he understood as the theology of the Council of Chalcedon elsewhere in his work. Thus, one could deduce that in his view the Russian academics who were immigrants in America had developed different visions of tradition and different agendas. Whether the attitude of Zizioulas followed the thought of Florovsky faithfully or not and in what ways is beyond the scope of this essay but it is possible that it was important for him as a neopatristic author.

What is the place of Dionysius in the work of Zizioulas? There seem to be two ways one could examine Zizioulas as a reader of this ancient source. One could be the explicit references to Dionysius in a number of early publications. The other could be specific cases where Zizioulas employed topics also developed by Dionysius but preferred to refer to other authorities from the ancient Church. In some cases he could have been



inspired by Dionysius to extend some of his ideas in the fields of the theory of the Church and man but did not. A preliminary note about Zizioulas' published work: the presence of Dionysius is under-represented compared to other authorities from the history of Christian thought, for example, Maximus the Confessor. Zizioulas intended to prepare a doctoral thesis about the latter under the supervision of Florovsky in one research stay in the United States. Later in his career he devoted an entire lecture to Maximus in the courses he delivered to undergraduate students in Thessaloniki; more recently he delivered a public talk about Maximus and a paper at a conference devoted to Maximus and his reception in Orthodox theology.<sup>80</sup> However he never devoted a self-contained publication to Dionysius and in a number of cases he preferred to refer to Maximus than to Dionysius on topics discussed by both of these authors. His publications on the theory of the Church are a characteristic example: Maximus is mentioned by name and is cited about four times more than his predecessor in the Christian tradition. Similarly, Zizioulas makes limited use of Gregory Palamas and has not devoted a self-contained study to him.<sup>81</sup>

In the few instances that the Greek theologian referred to Dionysius, there are some structural elements that could be interpreted as indicative of his personal agenda as a neopatristic author. One of these is that while he accepted the place of Dionysius in the Christian tradition, he avoided ascribing the title of saint to him. However, he did not do the same with Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, in contrast to Romanides, who was also a former student of Florovsky.<sup>82</sup> It is possible that in this way Zizioulas was attempting to avoid the hagiographical perspective of other neopatristic Greek theologians. Moreover, in his volume chapters and articles in the field of ecclesiology he rarely made references to Dionysius independently of Maximus and he also tended to cite exclusively the treatise known as *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.<sup>83</sup> These make him differ from other neopatristic readers of Dionysius in Greece, for example, Matsoukas, who stated that he had been inspired by the same Russian émigré thinker in his theological synthesis and used the rest of Dionysius' corpus in his handbooks on doctrine and elsewhere in his work.<sup>84</sup> This perhaps suggests that Zizioulas did not intend to treat Dionysius as a Christian thinker in his own right but decided to use the above treatise because a number of Western theologians agreed on its ecclesiastical content though were not sure about its connection with the other writings from the corpus. Finally, a paradox: the two most cited authorities from the ancient Church in the above studies of Zizioulas were the Apostle Paul and Ignatius of Antioch. However, the same authors were also important to the thought of Dionysius in that he invoked both by name and numerous passages from his work could be read as allusions to their own writings.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps Zizioulas did not intend to elaborate on Dionysius' method of theology and preferred to adapt his agenda both to him but also to these two predecessors of his in the tradition of the early Church.

How did Zizioulas evaluate Dionysius? His attitude to the ancient author may be understood as ambivalent in that he accepted his place in the Christian tradition but did not seem to consider him compatible with some of his predecessors and the later theology of the Greek East in his fields of interest. One example could be his views on the Church and the sacraments: he acknowledged that the mysticism of Dionysius was



Eucharistic but he did not trace that other than in the above treatise. In a few instances in his publications Zizioulas tended to be wary of the consequences of Platonism on ancient Christian thought and considered that in some cases an individualist ascetic practice appeared in the monastic sphere which was connected with Origen and the deviations to Platonism found in his work.<sup>86</sup> Dionysius was a different case but belonged to the same category of ancient authors: the Christian *Platonists*. Zizioulas estimated that Paul and Ignatius had contributed to a theory of the Church that was at odds with that of the Alexandrian theologians in that it did not undermine its institutional aspects for a charismatic treatment of the topic. It was not before Maximus that these two trends were assimilated in such a way that Platonism ceased to be a problem.<sup>87</sup> A second example could be Zizioulas' approach to Scripture and the last things: while he acknowledged Dionysius' use of Scripture, he considered that it was viewed through a larger narrative that did not allow him to build on its consequences in his liturgical theology and ecclesiology. He also argued that Dionysius' eschatological teachings were not of the same kind as those of his Byzantine interpreter but showed affinities with those of his antecedents from the school of Alexandria: they did not elaborate on the concept of time but on that of space and thus allegorical symbolism replaced the future that becomes present in the Eucharistic liturgy as a revealed truth.<sup>88</sup> A final example could be his view of God and creation: he did regard God's ecstatic activity as an important response to philosophical Hellenism but believed it was limited to the cosmic sphere and thus not sufficiently connected with the theology about Christ and the Trinity as that was achieved by Maximus who transformed it in his work.<sup>89</sup>

Some questions arise here on Zizioulas' treatment of Dionysius. Why was the ancient author to be read as the composer of a liturgical commentary and not of a coherent corpus of writings that developed themes of liturgical theology? Furthermore, why was he afraid of a reception of Dionysius that could lead to an individualist spiritual practice? The answers to these questions depend on the framework within which his writings are examined. It is true that in the Anglophone religious literature it is possible to find examples of works influenced by Dionysius that undermine what the Greek theologian defined as Eucharistic and ecclesiastical experience.<sup>90</sup> It also needs to be said that Zizioulas' use of the treatise mentioned earlier could be explained by the fact that the meanings of Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* began to become clear to readers from that context in the 1980s. This is apparent from the partial translation of the works of Dionysius that was used by a few generations of Anglophone readers by way of introduction to his thought: it did not incorporate the treatises on hierarchy and also understood Dionysian mysticism as an attitude related to hermeneutics.<sup>91</sup> It could be that in this respect the Greek theologian aimed to protect the voice of the East in the West. However, it should be noted that he did not attempt to revise his views after the new findings from the renaissance of Dionysian studies in the course of the 1980s.<sup>92</sup> It was only then that some scholars demonstrated how the above treatise could relate to the liturgical practice and the remaining corpus of Dionysius.

Zizioulas' attitude can also be read within the framework of the Orthodox tradition in Greece. In one of the lectures delivered later in his career he maintained on the occasion

of a question from one of his students that the tendency of some members of the church from the monastic world to reduce the frequency of or abstain from participation in the Eucharist in favour of solitary prayer in their cells suggested a theory similar to that of Origen and his followers. Zizioulas' response showed that he considered this a problem that could be observed in Greek religious practice but he did not provide further details.<sup>93</sup> His published work includes a number of references to Origen which are mostly negative. However, in other cases his critique of other Orthodox theologians seemed to be on similar grounds. It is possible that he sometimes employed Origen to oppose particular intellectuals and their followers in order to avoid a critique of their views by name. This method may be related to the neopatristic example which saw the history of the ancient Church becoming alive anew in the theological debates between modern Orthodox thinkers;<sup>94</sup> the Greek theologian could have inherited that method from his Russian émigré mentor. Similarly, part of the critique addressed to Dionysius in his work could have been a way to engage with problems of modern theology rather than a study of the ancient author in his own right. That is a feature of Zizioulas' agenda: he was aware of receptions of Dionysius but did not attempt to enrich his views through the developments in patristic scholarship and thus followed a particular practice from his vantage point.

That Zizioulas was a neopatristic thinker rather than a specialist of patristic thought in the way he handled Dionysius is evident from his views on Christ and time. He argued that the ancient author developed eschatology in his works but that it was similar to that of Origen in that it did not elaborate on the concept of the last things as revealed in the Eucharist. In his view, both of these authors treated the topic in the form of a symbolic theory which pointed to an archetype that was to be found in the past, perhaps revealing a dichotomy between eternal return and a revealed truth. It should be noted that early in his career he had become familiar with the scheme of Plato as opposed to Scripture and Christian eschatology suggested by notable Western scholars of his time.<sup>95</sup> But two questions emerge here: what about the Dionysian passages that manifest a Christian theology of the last things? What if the ancient author had used a personal language to argue for a biblical eschatology? Other Greek scholars viewed Dionysius as a contextual thinker who followed the principles of Scripture.<sup>96</sup> However, the present reader considered that the cosmological narrative of Dionysius' writings did not allow this different perspective. Thus, Dionysius could be interpreted either as part of the strand of theology established by Origen in the Christian tradition or as an initial attempt to propose views later developed and revised by Maximus. These estimations could be understood in light of the affinity of Zizioulas with the Russian émigré thinkers in America. It could be that, like his mentor and Fr. John Meyendorff (1926–1992), the Greek theologian considered Dionysius' work an attempt to 'Christianize' Hellenism that was *not* successful because it did not manage to convert Greek philosophy into Christian theology, as Maximus later did.<sup>97</sup> His view of the theory of symbols of Dionysius as a kind of philosophical eschatology applied to the Christian liturgy can also be found in Russian religious thought but with a difference: the Greek theologian considered that Maximus revised it towards a biblical example while Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983)

regarded that as a problem of the Byzantine liturgical commentaries in their entirety as a literary genre.<sup>98</sup>

A final comment about the shared themes between Zizioulas and the ancient author. His published work covered a range of areas, including ecumenical theology and the unity of the churches, the understanding of created order as a sacrament and the ecological problem, and the relationship between Christian doctrine and human existence. Dionysius could have proved useful in these areas. One example where Dionysius' work could have provided valuable insights is within the framework of the ecumenical movement. It is true that Zizioulas engaged with apophatic theology as an object of theoretical study and also that his inter-confessional activity reflected elements of this method of approach to God and other humans. However, in a number of cases he avoided employing the ancient author in these discussions, perhaps because it would not be practical to make explicit use of an author who was read with reservations by influential representatives from the traditions of his respondents in the ecumenical initiatives. Nevertheless, some of his ideas could be enriched by a careful use of Dionysius. A notable example is his approach to how one church receives the other churches and is received by them and how these churches aim together at the vision of the one Church. The concept of the one and the many could be employed here, as a body of hierarchies which participate in the concept of the one Hierarchy and each facilitates the route of the others towards theological truth.<sup>99</sup> Another example could be if the historical testimony of Dionysius to a theology that is not polemical to other bodies of Christians was employed in the same framework or even the dialogue with the Eastern Churches in particular. A useful point of reference could be the fact that he was revered as a saint in both of the churches that held different positions as to the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>100</sup> A final theme could be the theory that the gospel aims to assimilate one culture which is for some theologians what Dionysius himself achieved before other Byzantine Christian authors.<sup>101</sup> These examples show that the Greek theologian may be read as more Dionysian than the patristic evidence he used often allows.

## CONCLUSION

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The reception of Dionysius in the Greek scene may be understood properly if examined in conjunction with given factors that are connected with the history of ideas and the modern lenses of interpretation of the Christian past. These include the transition of theology from a traditional to an academic model and specific developments in the society and religious practice of modern Greece. The handling of the ancient author was in a number of cases connected with the problem of the relationship between tradition and modernity as understood by Greek theologians and scholars. The case of Karpathios serves to show that Dionysius was an object of study not only for readers from the lecture hall but also for the theologians of the local Church. The interest of Karpathios could be understood as fulfilling the academic standards of study and as related to or

even motivated by the need of Greek society to appreciate the value of the hagiographical perspective of Byzantine Orthodox theology.

The two subsequent cases examined in the present essay may be seen as two readings of Dionysius that adopted a similar method of approach but held different views as to his place in the tradition of the Fathers and the possible usefulness of his work for an engagement of modern religious thought with the questions posed by a different period. It is true that Yannaras attempted to examine Dionysius in opposition to the West and that he extended that polarity in his later work. However, he was trained outside Greece for a considerable period as a young theologian and thus his anti-Western attitude should be distinguished from non-intellectual tendencies of this kind, which may be observed in a few instances in religious groups from the Greek scene. The fact that his more recent public positions provided an impetus to these groups or that some of his views were used by them is a question of reception. However, it is clear here that there was a situational aspect of his early thought and that Dionysius could be useful to show that.

Zizioulas also used the ancient author in his development of a theological agenda that treated him as part of the Eastern tradition but in need of the interpretation of Maximus. Clearly, his work was inspired by a modern model of treatment of the Fathers of the Eastern tradition, which was different from that of Yannaras. It is true that when he started to use Dionysius he was already established as an intellectual and adapted him to his own interests. However, it should be noted that in some cases he did not attempt to follow the new findings of Dionysian scholarship but tended to be more interested in the vision of tradition that he had himself developed. It is evident that not only could he have referred to the Dionysian author more in his publications but also that a number of his views may be read as more Dionysian than he would wish to acknowledge.

## NOTES

1. Matsoukas 2003: 113.
2. Yannaras 2006: 465–466.
3. For two examples, see Makrides 2009: 215 and 218–219.
4. Papapetrou 1970: 128–130.
5. A pertinent incident from a visit in Mount Athos is narrated in O'Rourke 2005: xv–xvi.
6. Its last defenders include the Anglican John Parker and the Catholic Joseph Leonissa; the most extensive effort from an Orthodox reader is found in Bulhak 1938.
7. Stăniloae 1996: 7–13, esp. p. 13.
8. Von Balthasar 1962: 147–214, esp. pp. 147ff.
9. Matsoukas 2006: 409–413.
10. Some examples from the Greek literature can be found in Chatzimichael et al. 2008: 95–163; cf. also Keselopoulos 2006: 108–109.
11. Trembelas 1981: 23–58.
12. Papadopoulos 2002: 132–148 and 163–164; Farandos 1993.
13. Tsirpanles 1983: 264.
14. Bouzakis 2001: 39–41.

15. For some directions, see recently Dardavesis 2011.
16. Papamichael 1931 and his other works mentioned in the tribute to him in Karmires et al. 1956.
17. Russell 2017: 37.
18. Matsoukas 2003: 75–77.
19. Kladopoulos 1981; Siassos 1984.
20. Chrestou 1991: 526–531.
21. For their history and social work, see the bibliography mentioned in Pallis 2014: 304–305.
22. Yannaras 1972: 106–107; Matsoukas 2003: 120.
23. Trembelas 1956, vol. 1: 5–15, esp. pp. 5–6.
24. One example can be found in Trembelas 1956, vol. 3: 7–21, esp. pp. 13–17.
25. Karpathios 1925b: 283.
26. Iosephides-Gavras 1890: 80–85; Nakis 1894.
27. Vimpos 1865: 13 n. 1.
28. Kalogeras 1894: 19 and 28ff.
29. For some historical details about the Catholic presence in Attica and the Cathedral of Athens, see Vidales 1998: 21–86. A history of the current Orthodox cathedral does not exist; a possible occasion for a publication of this kind could be the centenary of the start of its construction (1923).
30. For a list of these studies, see the bibliography. Considering that Karpathios and his ecclesiastical and theological contributions are less well-known in Anglophone scholarship than those of the other two theologians examined here, see by way of introduction Printzipas et al. 2006: 22–64.
31. Karpathios 1922b.
32. Karpathios 1922a.
33. Karpathios 1922b.
34. Karpathios 1929: 47.
35. Karpathios 1923: 226.
36. Karpathios 1923: 222 and 226.
37. Karpathios 1925b: 283.
38. This unfinished project (1936–1940) may be considered a predecessor of the popular work *Threskeutike kai Ethike Egkuklopaideia* (1962–1968).
39. For example, they are not listed in the extensive bibliography which also included a number of Greek entries and is found in Spearritt 1968: 181–282.
40. Dervos 1913.
41. A few examples can be found in Bratsiotes 1948: 104 and 274.
42. Kalogeras 1887: 78–91; Vouteris 1918. It has been suggested recently that the Byzantine hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes may be the author of this encomiastic homily instead. For this hypothesis, see Gatsioufa 2011: 331–334 and 355.
43. For the history of the monastery, see Koulouriotes 2008: 59–162.
44. For two accounts by authors belonging to different generations, see Louvaris 1960: 9 and Yannaras 2006: 440.
45. Yannaras 1967; 1970a; 1970b.
46. Yannaras 2008. One possible interpretation of the title could be the *ineffable words* that Paul mentioned in 2 Cor. 12:2–4—an influential passage in Dionysius and in other Christian authors (cf. pp. 127ff.).

47. [Yannaras] 2012. The fact that he was inspired by Dionysius and his Byzantine readers becomes evident from a number of terms that he used (e.g. ἐκκλησιαστική *ἱερουργία*, *θεαρχική* τριάς and *ἐνική* τριάς καὶ μονάς) and the frequent employment of prefixes and suffixes that were shared with Dionysius (e.g. ὑπέρ-, -ργός, -δωρος). It should be noted that he also quoted a number of passages from the writings of the ancient author but did not refer to him. The same passages had been used in the monograph about Dionysius earlier (cf. e.g. pp. 10–12 of this text with Yannaras 1967: 51, 62–63, 70–71, 84–85, and 87). Two more elements could be that the text begins with an invocation of the Trinity in a similar manner to the introductory part of the Dionysian *Mystical Theology* as well as that both authors develop shared motifs in their writings, including love and beauty. There is also an important difference between this text and popular Byzantine liturgical texts: the absence of references to angels in the proposed Eucharistic service. However, this may not be unrelated to the scepticism expressed about the place of these created beings in Christian theology earlier in Yannaras 2008: 191–215, esp. pp. 207–211.
48. Yannaras 2001: 270–271 and 314–320. He even drew a parallel between him and the mentor of Plato (cf. pp. 316–317).
49. Two instances can be found in his talk at the School of Theology of the University of Athens on 19 April 2016 in which he presented the apophatic method ‘as he understood it’ and ‘in his opinion’. It could be claimed that personalism influenced him to employ these expressions but it is true that in his thought Dionysius and that modern lens are sometimes also related. The digital link to the talk is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLWjCcuEE3A> (last accessed: July 2018).
50. This view of the pre-Socratic philosopher was added in the second edition of the book. That is a feature of certain books of the Greek theologian: he rewrites parts of their original texts based on later developments of his thought. See here Yannaras 1988: 19 n. 2 and 22.
51. Every 1972; Louth 2005: 5.
52. Yannaras 2015: 49 and 273–274; for an example of how these ideas are applied in a political framework, see the book launch of a collection of feuilletons in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLRvKXhEDAI> (last accessed: March 2017).
53. Yannaras 1988: 9–11.
54. Cf. Pallis 2020: 365–366.
55. Yannaras 2005: 41–43.
56. Theodorou 1971: 5–29, esp. pp. 5–8.
57. Yannaras 2001: 9–15, esp. pp. 9 and 14 about the motifs of love and motherhood.
58. These authors were Basil Tatakis (1897–1986), Nikolaos Nissiotis (1924–1986), and Spyridon Kyriazopoulos (1932–1977).
59. Yannaras 2002: 15–16.
60. The text was authored slightly earlier but it was published as one of the essays in Yannaras 1969: 112–128.
61. The pairs found in that could include καταφύγιο ιδεών, πείνα και δίψα, αλφαβητάρι της πίστης and ελευθερία του ήθους.
62. See the work cited in n. 48.
63. Kyriazopoulos 2000. A number of chapters from this monograph, which adopted a historical and philosophical point of view, were published as three connected articles in the Greek Journal *Theologia* (1959–1960).
64. These readers include N. Matsoukas, N. G. Pentzikes, and the Athonite monk Theoklitos Dionysiates (1916–2006).

65. See Begzos 1986 and the theses cited in n. 19.
66. These authors include historians of philosophy, such as Konstantinos Logothetis (1883–1975), Konstantinos Georgoulis (1894–1968), B. Tatakis, and the theologian D. Balanos.
67. Balanos 1933: 383.
68. Compare a positive with a negative response: Florovsky 1968: 479 and Trembelas 1981: 47.
69. A notable case could be the repeated motif that it is futile for Christians to debate about divine truth given that it transcends human conceptions. See particularly from the sixth to the eighth epistles of the writings of Dionysius where that is applied to different contexts. Cf. Rorem 1993: 11–24.
70. One example can be found in Albert 2004: 103–122, esp. pp. 112ff. about the metaphor of the pearl ascribed to the Christian faith.
71. Details about these aspects can be found in Zizioulas 1993. That booklet was prepared in the form of supporting material for his candidacy to be elected a fellow of the Academy of Athens.
72. Zizioulas 1990: 7–12, esp. pp. 7–8 and 11.
73. Those of that period are tabulated in Belezos 2007: 28–41. The above ecumenical initiatives were mostly the works of the World Council of Churches and of the ones before and after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).
74. Zizioulas 1993: 13–15, 37–38, and 41, but also elsewhere.
75. One example can be found in Zizioulas 2004: 124–125.
76. Yannaras 2006: 338–339 and 464–465.
77. Zizioulas 1972: 35–37; 1977: 168.
78. Zizioulas 2006: 30–31 nn. 50–51; 2009: 191–192.
79. Zizioulas 1986a: 66–67.
80. For the last, see Zizioulas 2013.
81. Here I have consulted the index of Zizioulas 2016: 872–879. That may be reflected also in the self-presentation of his career, which does not include the above Christian authors to those that have influenced his work. For this view, see Zizioulas 1993: 42 and 47–50.
82. Romanides 2009: 38, 82, and 101–103.
83. Zizioulas 2006: 288 and 301. I follow the division of his publications by subject that has been proposed by himself recently (see the vol. cited in n. 81).
84. A number of examples are found in Matsoukas 2005: e.g. 135–136 (*On the Divine Names*), 139 (*On Mystical Theology*), 188 (*On the Celestial Hierarchy*), 224 (*On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*), and 305 (*Epistles*).
85. Heil and Ritter 1991: 240–243 and 261.
86. Zizioulas 1986c: 41–43.
87. Zizioulas 1986a: 37–39.
88. Zizioulas 1982: 147–149.
89. Zizioulas 2004: 86.
90. Spearing 2001.
91. Rolt 1940.
92. Here I refer to the three monographs on the liturgical theology of Dionysius by Paul Rorem (b. 1948), Alexander Golitzin (b. 1948), and Andrew Louth (b. 1944).
93. Zizioulas 1991b: 33. It is not clear here whether by this statement he referred to a particular phenomenon of his contemporary Greek culture or that formed an indirect critique of one or more Greek theologians or even both of these. For the ancient context of this example in his view, see the work cited in n. 86.



94. For examples of that strategy, see Gavriluk 2014: 109–111, 140–141, and 146–148, but also elsewhere.
95. A notable case could be the Lutheran theologian and ecumenist, Oscar Cullmann (1902–1999), who was influential on Greek theologians of that generation but also on the ones that followed. For example, see Cullmann 1946: 43ff. The present book was available in Greek already from the early 1980s. Some of his other works have also been translated more recently.
96. One of these was Georgios Galites (b. 1926), Professor of Interpretation of the New Testament, who included Dionysius in a handbook of New Testament studies. See Galites 1981: 140–178, where he employed apophatic theology and Dionysius as a response to particular trends of Protestant biblical scholarship.
97. Florovsky 1968: 479; cf. Meyendorff 1974: 28–31, but also elsewhere.
98. Schmemmann 1981. The present idea could have extended what is also developed in Meyendorff 1974.
99. Zizioulas 1986b.
100. Zizioulas 1981: 145–146.
101. Zizioulas 1991a: 93–98.

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## CHAPTER 38

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# JACQUES DERRIDA AND JEAN-LUC MARION

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TIMOTHY D. KNEPPER

THIS essay maps the issues of interpretation of the Dionysian corpus that divide the twentieth-century French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. It charts the development of these issues through four publications: Derrida's 1968 essay 'Differance', Marion's 1977 monograph *Idol and Distance*, Derrida's 1987 essay 'Denials: How to Avoid Speaking', and Marion's 1997 essay 'In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of "Negative Theology"' (which is followed by a brief exchange between Derrida and Marion).<sup>1</sup> Although the major point of contention between Derrida and Marion concerns the relationship between (Derridean) deconstruction and (Dionysian) negative theology, two key issues of interpretation of the Dionysian corpus arise in the process: whether Dionysian (de-)negation and Dionysian prayer yield a determinate, superessential God, or whether they lead beyond all determinations and predications of being. The essay examines these interpretive contentions, as well as some less central issues regarding the divine names, causation, and hierarchy. It concludes by demonstrating where both philosophers' interpretations get the Dionysian corpus wrong, due in large part to the ways in which they strongly read their own philosophical frameworks—Derrida's philosophy of language and Marion's theology of religion—onto the Dionysian corpus.

## DERRIDA'S 'DIFFERENCE'

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The whole kerfuffle begins with a mere paragraph from Derrida's lecture 'Difference', which he delivered to the Société Française de Philosophie in January of 1968.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the provocative claims are located in just two sentences, the first of which refuses the identification of Derrida's notion of *differance* with the God of negative theology, the second of which criticizes negative theology's inability to go beyond being.<sup>3</sup>



And yet what is thus denoted as *differance* is not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theology. The latter, as we know, is always occupied with letting a supraessential reality go beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastens to remind us that, if we deny the predicate of existence to God, it is in order to recognize him as a superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being.<sup>4</sup>

Four sentences prior, Derrida confesses that his grammar of *differance*—his ‘detours, phrases, and syntax’—is ‘practically indiscernible’ from that of negative theology.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the substance of *differance*, however, Derrida insists on a crucial difference. With *differance*, ‘there is no question of such a move’—i.e. of denying the predicate of existence in order to posit a higher mode of existence, as negative theology does according to Derrida.<sup>6</sup> *Differance*, in fact, cannot be reduced to any discourse, for it is the very condition of discourse; thus it makes possible ontotheology, one form of which is negative theology.

Not only is *differance* irreducible to every ontological or theological—onto-theological—reappropriation, but it opens up the very space in which onto-theology—philosophy—produces its system and its history. It thus encompasses and irrevocably surpasses onto-theology or philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

These, then, are the initial questions: Is *differance* identical to the God of negative theology? Is negative theology a form of ‘onto-theology’? Although neither question is about Dionysius per se, both are relevant to Derrida’s and Marion’s disagreements about the Areopagite.

Regarding the first question—Is *differance* identical to the God of negative theology?—we can begin by assembling some of Derrida’s claims about *differance*. Repeatedly, Derrida avers that *differance* is neither a word nor a concept; rather it is the condition and productive origin of signification.<sup>8</sup> *Differance* is never itself present; rather, it motivates two different movements of differing—spatial difference and temporal deferral.<sup>9</sup> As the former, *differance* is productive of differences between signifiers, between signifieds, and between signifiers and signifieds. As the latter, *differance* is not only the deferral of presence, by which no signified is ever fully and solely present to its signifier, but also the (impossible) end of presence towards which every act of signification is motivated (e.g. I speak and write so that I can be understood perfectly). In sum, *differance* is what makes it possible for signs to mean, and therefore also for humans to think and be aware. Thus *differance* is clearly not the God of negative theology. Which, though, has priority? This is one question about which Derrida and Marion will disagree.

With regard to the second question—Is negative theology a form of ontotheology?—there is less to say now and more to say later. As the first quote above demonstrates, Derrida believes that negative theology is concerned to show how a positive presence—God—is beyond the categories of essence and existence. Negative theology, therefore,



denies the existence of God in order to recognize a 'special' kind of superexistence for God—an existence that is superior, inconceivable, and ineffable. It is with regard to the writings of Dionysius that Derrida will attempt to demonstrate, and Marion will attempt to refute, this claim.

## MARION'S IDOL AND DISTANCE

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Almost one decade later, Jean-Luc Marion's 1977 monograph *L'idole et la distance* delivers a critique not only of Derrida's theorization of *différance* but also of Derrida's interpretation of negative theology.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, *Idol and Distance* contains a lengthy exposition of Dionysius, which falls under the four headings of the fourth chapter, 'The Distance of the Requisite and the Discourse of Praise'. Later, in his fifth and final chapter—'Distance and Icon'—Marion devotes half of its penultimate section to a critique of Derrida. The analysis below will be organized similarly.

Marion begins his exposition of Dionysius by asking which language is suitable to distance, i.e. which language can speak the withdrawal of the divine (which coincides with the intimacy of the divine) such that humans might inhabit it?<sup>11</sup> Marion's ultimate answer—Dionysius's discourse of praise—will await Marion's fourth and final section. His first section, entitled 'Unthinkable Eminence', turns first to Dionysian negation, which Marion understands as Dionysius' means of removing idolatrous predications.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say, for Marion (as for Dionysius), that the negations are true; rather, negation too is idolatrous 'if it remains categorical'.<sup>13</sup> Employing Dionysius' Plotinian sculpture metaphor, Marion therefore declares: 'Negation clears away and highlights a silhouette, far from opening onto a void'.<sup>14</sup> Thus Dionysian denegation is used 'in order all the better to know—without any idea'.<sup>15</sup> Here, Marion recognizes Dionysius' claims that negation is 'according to transcendence and not at all according to insufficiency'.<sup>16</sup> But Marion does not yet say what this transcendence is, save that it is not a higher order of affirmation or sublation.

For most Neoplatonists, transcendence is to be understood in terms of causes and effects. By contrast, Marion understands Dionysius' use of the Greek terms *aitia*/*aitiata* not as that which causes and that which is caused, but rather as that which all things require (*requisit*) and that to which all things therefore make request in prayer (*requérant*). Thomas Carlson, the translator of *Idol and Distance*, renders these terms into English as *requisite* and *requestant*—hence the title of this second section: 'The Request of the Requisite'. Why not translate *aitia* as cause? Marion maintains that only by removing Dionysian *aitia* both from the Aristotelian topic of a fourfold condition and from the modern reduction of *aitia* to efficient causation is it possible to avoid treating *aitia* as a false name for God, locating a metaphysical idol in it.<sup>17</sup> If the Dionysian 'cause of all' is instead recognized 'as the Requisite of prayer wherein all requestants receive distance and acknowledge it as anterior', it not only becomes the 'operative concept within the critique of all idols of the divine' but also 'passes beyond disqualification' since it

is 'hyperbolic and therefore unthinkable'.<sup>18</sup> In calling God the 'cause of all', Dionysius means that God is transcendently unthinkable, unnamable by any name, *aitia* included.

Marion's third section—'Immediate Mediation'—turns to the Dionysian notion of hierarchy, which Marion sees as Dionysius' answer to the question about how to traverse distance.<sup>19</sup> For Marion, Dionysian hierarchy is not to be understood as 'a nonreciprocal relation between two symmetrical terms', one superior, the other inferior.<sup>20</sup> Thus hierarchy is not to be associated with the 'vulgar concept' of top-down power deployed by the 'petty marquis of theology' and the 'despots of the para-episcopal apparatus'.<sup>21</sup> Rather, Dionysian hierarchy involves the act of giving and receiving. No actual content is given in this act; rather, '[t]he gift itself consists uniquely in the act of receiving/giving, and in no other "content"'.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the gift just is the giver, who 'becomes ineluctably responsible for his neighbour and offers on his face the sole vision of God that the neighbour will perhaps ever see'.<sup>23</sup> Marion maintains that this hierarchical process mediates the immediate: although each act is hierarchically mediated, it is an immediate relationship between giver and receiver. This is the 'mystery of hierarchy'—'that mediation (separation) does not contradict but reinforces immediacy (unity)'.<sup>24</sup>

Marion's fourth and final section returns to the leading question of the chapter: what language is suitable to distance? His answer is located in his title of the section: 'The Discourse of Praise'. According to Marion, Dionysius substitutes 'to praise' (*hymnein*) for the 'to say' of predicative language.<sup>25</sup> In the case of predication, the subject is exhausted adequately in the sum of that which is predicated of it. Praise, by contrast, is a discourse of distance with regard to God's unnamability and God's many-namability. According to Marion, Dionysius accomplishes this distance through the use of 'as' (*ōs*); all praise of God is 'as' such-and-such. Marion's formula for this is '*x* praises the Requisite as *y*', where *x* is the requestant that is doing the praising, and *y* is the divine name that is praised of the Requisite. *Y* therefore becomes the relation of request between the requestant and the Requisite.

We come, finally, to Marion's critique of Derrida's notion of *différance* and reading of negative theology. Marion first charges that Derridean *différance* reduces the 'distance of the Father' (i.e. God or the Requisite) to a mere nostalgia for the 'purely paternal language', 'the lost fatherland of thought'.<sup>26</sup> Marion then maintains that Derridean *différance* reduces all theology, negative theology included, to ontotheology, representing God as a being, which for Marion is idolatry.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Marion accuses Derridean *différance* of performing a sleight of hand: in place of Heideggerian ontological difference between Being and beings (as well as the Dionysian distinction between the Requisite and requestants), it substitutes *différance* and difference. But how, asks Marion, can one keep the Derridean terms of '*trace*, *forgetting*, and *difference* outside of the Being of beings where, to begin with, they appear?'<sup>28</sup> For Marion, this is a 'paradox', 'an aporia produced by the system itself: Derridean *différance* can only reject the anteriority or primacy of the Heideggerian ontological difference (or the Dionysian Requisite/requestants) by taking on the 'characteristic spoils' of the 'dismissed instance'.<sup>29</sup> This appeal to anteriority, however, has been censured by Derrida. Thus Marion concludes that *différance* does not surpass 'the ontological place of the Fold of Being/beings' and reduce it to a mere regional difference; rather, '*différance* could indeed offer itself to the ontological difference as a new ontic regionality waiting to be situated'.<sup>30</sup>

## DERRIDA'S 'HOW TO AVOID SPEAKING: DENIALS'

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Exactly one decade later (1987), Derrida's most sustained exposition of the Dionysian corpus is published: 'Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations'.<sup>31</sup> Early in the essay, Derrida reiterates his nearly two-decade earlier disavowal that what he writes is negative theology. Given that negative theology 'seems to reserve, beyond all predication, beyond all negation, even beyond Being, some hyperessentiality, a being beyond Being', Derrida avers that he had to forbid himself 'to write in the register of "negative theology"'.<sup>32</sup> Pointing out that *hyperousios*—'being beyond Being' or 'being without Being'—is precisely 'the word that Dionysius so often uses in the *Divine Names*', Derrida demonstrates how 'the apophatic voyage' in Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* is accompanied by 'the promise of that presence given to intuition or vision'.<sup>33</sup> Even if Dionysius' vision is that of a dark light, a *hyperphoton* darkness, 'it is still the immediacy of a presence'.<sup>34</sup> And even if Dionysius' mystic union is an act of unknowing, it is also 'a genuine vision and a genuine knowledge'.<sup>35</sup> Paradoxically, though, this union of presence can never occur insofar as Dionysius' apophatic theology is coextensive with his kataphatic theology. Asserts Derrida, 'the apophatic movement cannot contain within itself the principle of its interruption. It can only indefinitely defer the encounter with its own limit'.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, though, Derrida admits that his objection (to having deconstruction equated with negative theology) constituted an implicit promise to one day speak about negative theology: 'one day I would have to stop deferring, one day I would have to try to explain myself directly on this subject, and at last speak of "negative theology" *itself*, assuming that some such things exists'.<sup>37</sup> This implicit promise brings Derrida back to the title of his essay, 'How to avoid speaking?' as well as to the question that motivated his opening paragraph: 'Is an obligation before the first word possible?'<sup>38</sup> To put Derrida's answers to these questions concisely: no, it is not possible to avoid speaking, because, yes, there is an obligation before the first word. The obligation is that of saying something to someone; it makes possible all discourse, even all silence, at least insofar as one intends to say nothing to no one.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, though, one can never say some one thing to some one person since polyvocality and polyvalence are constitutive of language—meaning is always deferred and differenced. Discourse is therefore motivated by that which it cannot attain.

Even in negative theology, then, it is impossible to avoid speaking, at least insofar as the question 'how to avoid speaking?' is raised. Writes Derrida:

At the moment when the question 'how to avoid speaking?' is raised and articulates itself in all its modalities—whether in rhetorical or logical forms of saying, or in the simple fact of speaking—it is already, so to speak, *too late*. There is no longer any question of not speaking. Even if one speaks and says nothing, even if an apophatic discourse deprives itself of meaning or of an object, it takes place.<sup>40</sup>

For Derrida, this is because that which has committed or rendered discourse possible has already taken place—namely, the absent referent, the call of the other, meaning, truth.<sup>41</sup> Even the most negative theology preserves this trace of the other: ‘A trace of an event older than it or of a “taking-place” to come.’<sup>42</sup> In Dionysian negative theology, this absent other is God; God’s name names ‘the trace of the singular event that will have rendered speech possible even before it turns itself back toward—in order to respond to—this first or last reference.’<sup>43</sup> For Derrida, ‘This is why apophatic discourse must also open with a prayer that recognizes, assigns, or ensures its destination: the Other as Referent of a *legein* [to say] which is none other than its Cause.’<sup>44</sup> Earlier in the essay Derrida, therefore, called it ‘a piece of luck’ that Dionysius’ own *Mystical Theology* is preceded by prayer, for this exemplifies how discourse is not only directed to an absolute other that is never present but also subject to repetition, deferral, and difference. This duality ‘may be extended to all language, and even to all manifestation in general’; indeed, it ‘is inscribed in the structure of the mark.’<sup>45</sup>

In the latter half of the essay, Derrida turns to three (non-teleological) stages or places related to avoiding speaking: the Greek/Platonic, the Christian/Dionysian, and the Heideggerian. The point here is to draw a contrast not only between the two heterogeneous movements or tropics of negativity in the Platonic corpus—Plato’s good beyond being and *khora*<sup>46</sup>—but also between the latter of these, the *khora*, and Dionysian negative theology. Thus Derrida begins the second section (on the Christian/Dionysian paradigm) by asking about the relationship between the ‘experience’ of the *khora*—which isn’t an experience at all since the *khora* isn’t anything at all—and the *via negativa* in its Christian stage. His answer is that the experience of the *khora* has nothing to do with a negative theology—the experience of the *khora* is not a prayer, a celebration, or an encomium. This leads Derrida into an analysis of (Dionysian) prayer, which is constituted by two elements: first, prayer is an address to the other as other; second, prayer is or contains an encomium or celebration.<sup>47</sup> Although the former, the ‘pure prayer’ (without the encomium), ‘implies nothing other than the supplicating address to the other ... without any other determination’, the latter, the encomium, ‘preserves an irreducible relationship to the attribution.’<sup>48</sup> It is through the encomium, then, that the Dionysian God, as the addressee of Dionysian prayer, is qualified and determined as some particular other, some particular God. Derrida therefore plaintively asks:

[H]ow can one deny that the encomium qualifies God and *determines* prayer, *determines* the other, Him to whom it addresses itself, refers, invoking Him even as the source of prayer? How can one deny that, in this movement of determination (which is no longer the pure address of the prayer to the other), the appointment of the *trinitary* and hyperessential God distinguishes Dionysius’ *Christian* prayer from all other prayer?<sup>49</sup>

Thus even if Dionysius’ encomium is ‘neither true nor false, nor even contradictory,’ it still ‘says something *about* the thearchy.’<sup>50</sup> Moreover, this encomium, which speaks *of* (God), is inseparable from the ‘pure’ prayer, which speaks *to* (God).<sup>51</sup>

To exemplify this inseparability between the ‘pure prayer’ to God and the ‘encomium’ about God, Derrida points out that Dionysius’ prayer is spoken not only to God but also to Timothy, Dionysius’ addressee, his ‘best reader’. Dionysius need not turn away from God (as absolute other) in order to turn to Timothy (as discursive address). In fact, ‘[i]t is exactly because he does not turn away from God that he can turn toward Timothy and *pass from one address to the other without changing direction*.’<sup>52</sup> ‘The writing of Dionysius’, therefore, ‘stands in the space of that *apostrophe* which *turns aside* the discourse in the *same* direction, between the prayer itself, the quotation of the prayer, and the address to the disciple.’<sup>53</sup> ‘None of this would be possible’, declares Derrida:

without the possibility of quotations (more generally, of repetition), and of an apostrophe that allows one to speak to several people at once. The prayer, the quotation of the prayer, and the apostrophe, from one you to the other, thus weave the *same* text, however heterogeneous they appear. There is a text because of this repetition.<sup>54</sup>

Thus Derrida later ends his essay by maintaining:

Perhaps there would be no prayer, no pure possibility of prayer, without what we glimpse as a menace or as a contamination: writing, the code, repetition, analogy or the—at least apparent—multiplication of addresses, initiation. If there were a purely pure experience of prayer, would one need religion and affirmative or negative theologies?<sup>55</sup>

There are, then, at least three significant ways in which Derrida’s reading of the Dionysian corpus differs from Marion’s.<sup>56</sup> Most notably, Derrida finds a dual meaning in Dionysius’ use of *hyper*, especially in *hyperousios* constructions: ‘what is above in a hierarchy, thus both beyond and more.’<sup>57</sup> The Dionysian God is beyond being as both without being and superessential being. Secondly, even if Dionysian prayer is not predicative in nature, it contains an encomium and therefore ‘preserves the style and structure of the predicative affirmation’, i.e. ‘[i]t says something about someone.’<sup>58</sup> It is not, therefore, ‘the case of the prayer that apostrophizes, addresses itself to the other and remains, in this pure movement, absolutely pre-predicative.’<sup>59</sup> Finally, Marion cannot so easily disentangle a ‘sacred’-mystical interpretation of the Dionysian notion of hierarchy from a ‘vulgar’-political one. And even if he can disentangle these deployments of *hierarchy* in words, he cannot eliminate ‘the historic, essential, undeniable, and irreducible possibility of the aforementioned [vulgar/political] perversity.’<sup>60</sup>

## MARION’S ‘IN THE NAME’

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Yet another ten years brings the first public exchange between Derrida and Marion on negative theology and Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>61</sup> At the 1997 Villanova conference on

'Religion and Postmodernism', Marion delivers a paper entitled 'In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of "Negative Theology"', wherein he begins by announcing what is at stake in the contest: for Derridean deconstruction, negative theology is 'its first serious rival, perhaps the only one possible'.<sup>62</sup> What is at issue for deconstruction is therefore deconstruction itself. Derridan deconstruction must deconstruct negative theology as radically as possible—both negative theology's claim to deconstruct God and negative theology's claim to reach God in this deconstruction—for if it fails to do so, it suffers a defeat since it can no longer 'forbid access to God, outside presence and without Being'.<sup>63</sup> Thus Marion maintains that when deconstruction sets out to attack negative theology, 'it is not making an attack so much as it is defending itself'.<sup>64</sup>

How does deconstruction do this? Marion believes that Derrida's objections to negative theology can be reduced to the following four: (1) Negative theology can be assimilated to a Christian philosophy, indeed to what is most 'Greek' about ontotheology; (2) Negative theology can therefore be inscribed within the horizon of Being; (3) Negative theology negates the essence, Being, or truth of God in order to better re-establish them; thus negations always end up as quasi-affirmations; (4) Negative theology's prayer that praises (*hymnein*) is a disguised form of predication, i.e. not pure prayer (*euchē*).<sup>65</sup> Although Marion calls these objections crude, he maintains they nevertheless must be confronted, especially the third one since it obliges Christian theology to take seriously the question of whether Christian theology is subject to deconstruction or not.

Marion begins with this third objection, calling on the Dionysian corpus to defend negative theology from deconstruction. For Dionysius, maintains Marion, there is a threefold (not twofold) division between affirmation, negation, and that which is beyond both affirmation and negation. This 'third way'—the 'denomination' of God—concerns a form of speech which no longer says something about something (or a name of someone), but which denies all relevance to predication, rejects the nominative function of names, and suspends the rule of truth's two values.<sup>66</sup> Here, Marion reiterates his claim in *Idol and Distance* that *aitia* 'has no other function but to pass beyond every affirmation and negation'.<sup>67</sup> *Aitia* does not affirm or deny a name of God; rather, it 'denominates God, breaking "with every predicative or designative function"', and implementing 'the strictly pragmatic function of language—namely, to refer names and their speaker to the unattainable yet inescapable interlocutor beyond every name and every denegation of names'.<sup>68</sup> Marion believes that the 'third way' does not, therefore, say (or deny) something about something; rather, it refers 'to Him who is no longer touched by nomination'.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Marion avers that he can, 'at least from Dionysius's point of view, deny Objection 3'.<sup>70</sup>

Marion next turns to the fourth objection—that the prayer that praises is a disguised form of predication, not a prayer pure and simple. Marion's argument here turns on a proper understanding of the proper name, which, according to Marion, 'never belongs properly ... to the one who receives it' and never is 'a name for the essence'.<sup>71</sup> This is true of all proper names: 'the proper name marks the fact that an individual's presence remains anonymous in direct proportion to the degree to which its name becomes more



present.<sup>72</sup> Thus even if praise attributes a name to God, it does not name God's presence but rather 'marks his absence, anonymity, and withdrawal'.<sup>73</sup> In what seems to be a misunderstanding of Derrida's notion of 'pure prayer', Marion also contends that pure prayer cannot be accomplished without naming since 'without the invocation the prayer would be impossible'.<sup>74</sup> Marion therefore believes that 'prayer and praise are carried out in the very same operation', which does not name but rather denominates 'as' or 'inasmuch as'.<sup>75</sup> Finally, Marion claims that prayer is not predicative but purely pragmatic: 'It is no longer a matter of naming or attributing something to something, but of aiming in the direction of ... of relating to ... of comporting oneself towards ... of reckoning with ... in short of dealing with ...'.<sup>76</sup> Thus Marion says there are many reasons to oppose the fourth objection.

With regard to objection two, it suffices for Marion to specify how Dionysius clearly and precisely rejects the determination of God by Being, first by showing how 'the first denominations of God are drawn from the horizon of the good rather than that of being', then by showing how goodness itself 'does not attain the essence and hovers, so to speak, between the derived names and the un-namable'.<sup>77</sup> Marion's response to objection one is a bit more involved. First, he adduces written testimony to show how 'the theologians' freed God from Being and did so in response to 'heretics' (Arians) who attempted 'to include God within presence by assigning him a proper name and offering a definition for his essence'.<sup>78</sup> Then he gives an account of how the renunciation of comprehension of God constitutes 'an authentic form of knowledge and not just failure of knowing'.<sup>79</sup> This account takes an Anselmian form:

Even if we were to comprehend God as such (by naming him in terms of his essence), we would at once be knowing not God as such, but less than God, because we could easily conceive an other still greater than the one we comprehend. For the one we comprehend would always remain less than and below the one we do not comprehend. Incomprehensibility therefore belongs to the formal definition of God.<sup>80</sup>

Marion therefore contends that denomination does not end up in 'a metaphysics of presence' but rather in 'a *theology of absence*—where the name is given as having no name, as not giving the essence, and having nothing but this absence to make manifest'.<sup>81</sup> Thus Marion believes he has 'stood up' to the second objection.

Finally, Marion's essay ends by showing how phenomenology can be used to conceive the 'formal possibility' of the phenomenon that seems to demand 'an absence of divine names' and our entering into the Name.<sup>82</sup> Here, Marion distinguishes between the Husserlian phenomenological terms of intention and intuition—the former, the mental conception; the latter, the phenomenal fulfilment of the conception. When an intuition is adequate to the intention, we have the way of *kataphasis*—what is intended is given in intuition. When an intuition is not adequate to an intention, we have the way of *apophasis*—what is intended is not given in intuition. And when the intuition exceeds the intention, we have what Marion calls a 'saturated phenomenon', where '[w]hat is given disqualifies every concept'.<sup>83</sup> In this third case, God is not imperceptible, but



rather incomprehensible—not without giving intuition, but rather without adequate concept. It is precisely in this third case, maintains Marion, that ‘the theologians reach de-nomination’ by ‘undoing of the concept and intentionality.’<sup>84</sup> Thus, Marion reaffirms that ‘the third way cannot be confused with the sufficiency of the concept in the first way [*kataphasis*] nor with the insufficiency of intuition in the second [*apophasis*].’<sup>85</sup>

The exchange to follow is somewhat disappointing, particularly given that it is the only one in print between Derrida and Marion on negative theology and Dionysius. Derrida’s response delicately admonishes Marion for not reading him carefully enough, especially with regard to Dionysius. In fact, Derrida maintains that he shares with Marion the conclusions on the basis of which Marion objects to his reading of negative theology and Dionysius. In particular, Derrida notes that he does recognize and account for Dionysius’ ‘third way’. Finally, Derrida invites a deeper conversation with Marion about pragmatics, the performative aspect of prayer, liturgy, and praise. In response, Marion simply highlights the fact that, although Derrida and he might agree about the existence of a ‘third way’, they disagree about whether it reinscribes being/presence.

## ASSESSMENT

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As with so many modern interpretations of the Dionysian corpus, these French post-modernist interpretations—Marion’s in particular—suffer from a fundamental misunderstanding about what divine names are and do. Dionysian divine names are not mere metaphors or arbitrary signifiers; they are not even names as we moderns tend to think of names. Rather each divine name is a divine cause (*aitia*) or procession (*proodos*) or source (*archē*) or power (*dynamis*) by which properties are made available to participating beings.<sup>86</sup> When Dionysius is at his most careful, therefore, he *auto*-prefixes divine names to distinguish between them and the properties that they process. *Life-itself*, for example, is the cause of life in things that live.

Technically, then, *aitia* is not one among many divine names; instead, each divine name is an *aitia*. And as ‘the cause of all’, God is all the divine names by which God sources intelligible properties to participating beings. By contrast, Marion maintains that the Dionysian God is ‘the cause of all’ as ‘the Requisite of prayer wherein all requestants receive distance and acknowledge it as anterior’. Although we would need to know more about how this ‘reception of distance’ works to know if it accords with the Dionysian metaphysics of procession, we at least know that Marion disavows Aristotelian and ‘modern’ interpretations of *aitia*. Moreover, he believes that interpreting *aitia* as ‘a privileged denomination that would escape the conceptual asceticism that it renders possible would imply a crude paralogism.’<sup>87</sup>

The Dionysian God, though, is the cause of all. Repeatedly Dionysius asserts this; never does Dionysius deny this. The Dionysian God causes things not only to be but also to be the kinds of things they are, doing so by means of his divine names. In the

very least, then, Marion needs to provide an account of the causation and determination of beings for Dionysius. And since causation via the divine names is so integral to the Dionysian corpus, Marion would also need to show both how *aitia* is not a 'privileged denomination' of God and how causation via the divine names does not 'say something' about God—namely that the Dionysian God is the cause of all by means of his divine names.

Just as there is precision to Dionysian procession, so there is a precision to Dionysian negation. *Aphairesis* is the process of removing perceptible symbols and intelligible divine names from God, while *apophasis* is the method of interpreting these removals superabundantly (*hyperochē*) rather than privatively (*sterēsis*). Key here is the term *hyperochē*, which registers a sense of being both beyond/without and above/more. What this means is that the hymnist comes to understand that God does not possess the properties that the divine names source but is the divine names themselves, which are *hyper-unified* and *hyper-being* powers or processions. For example, God does not possess wisdom (in an ordinary sense) but is the cause of wisdom as the divine name *wisdom-itself*. How does this relate to the debate between Derrida and Marion about Dionysian hymning? Contra Marion, Dionysian hymning says something about God, revealing who God is: the Trinitarian cause of all by means of the divine names. Derrida would seem to be correct, then, in showing how Dionysian hymning always includes an encomium that determines its recipient. Derrida, though, is more concerned in using the Dionysian corpus to exemplify *differance*, demonstrating how language is, on the one hand, motivated by the 'pure praise' of precise meaning and singular truth but, on the other hand, always subject to the 'encomium' of differing and deferring.

This is also true in the case of Derrida's and Marion's fundamental disagreement about whether negative theology in general and the Dionysian corpus in particular truly go 'beyond being' or merely reinscribe God within being—the issue is more about Derrida's philosophy of language and Marion's philosophy of religion than about the Dionysian corpus. For Derrida, language is marked by the above dialectic—we 'speak', even to ourselves, to be understood singularly and perfectly, in spite of the fact that signification requires repeatability and therefore the continual deferral and differing of singular, perfect meaning. Nothing escapes this process; nothing goes 'beyond being' in this sense. For Marion, however, God escapes this process in the sense that God is no thing among things and therefore is 'beyond being'. God then becomes something like Derridean *differance* or the *khora*. But if that is the case, maintains Derrida, then God cannot be determinate in any way, not even symbolically or metaphorically or pragmatically. The moment God becomes determinate in some way—e.g. as cause of all, as related somehow to the divine names, as praised, as negated, as Christian, as Father, etc.—God is no longer 'beyond being'. (Of course, the same holds true for *differance* and the *khora*.)

What, then, about the God of Dionysius? Well, Dionysius clearly and repeatedly tells us that God is *hyper* being. But at the same time, Dionysius tells us lots of things about this *hyper-being* God—that he is a Trinitarian thearchy, the cause of all, the divine names (at least in some manner), the source of 'scriptures' by which humans can know him, the

source of celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies by which uplifting to God occurs, and so forth. So, if 'beyond being' means entirely indeterminate, then the Dionysian God is not beyond being. Suffice it to say that 'beyond being' does not mean for Dionysius what it means for French postmodernism.<sup>88</sup> (The same goes for 'ineffable'.)

Finally, we come to the issue of hierarchy, which is a neglected component of the Dionysian corpus in Derrida's and Marion's interpretations and discussions. What little attention is paid to it again says more about Derrida's and Marion's own (political) philosophies than about the Dionysian corpus, with Marion contending that Dionysian hierarchy is mystical and spiritual, not ecclesiastical and political, and Derrida countering that such 'corruptions' are of course always possible. Like most modern interpreters of the Dionysian corpus, however, Derrida and Marion say next to nothing about, on the one hand, the celestial hierarchies and their knowledge of God, their passing down of this knowledge, and their uplifting of those below them; and on the other hand, the ecclesiastical hierarchies and their orders of clergy and laity, their sacraments of deification and unification, and teaching of 'scriptural' truths. Had they paid more attention to these two treatises (*Celestial Hierarchy*, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*), perhaps their interpretations and discussions of the Dionysian God 'beyond being' might have played out differently. Then again, perhaps not, since this was never really about the Dionysian corpus.<sup>89</sup>

## NOTES

1. Although Derrida's essay 'Sauf le nom' is highly relevant to his understanding and analysis of negative theology, it does not contain extensive exposition of the Dionysian corpus and therefore has been omitted.
2. This address was later published in the *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* LXII, No. 3 in July–Sept 1968, 73–101. The English translation by David B. Allison is in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, 129–160 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
3. *Differance* is Derrida's intentional misspelling of the French term *différence*, which conveys both a spatial differing and a temporal deferring. The difference between *differance* and *différence* can only be detected in writing, not speech; *differance* thereby serves Derrida's critique of logocentrism, the privileging of speech over writing.
4. Derrida 1973: 134.
5. Derrida 1973: 134.
6. Derrida 1973: 134.
7. Derrida 1973: 134–135.
8. Derrida 1973: 130–131, 135–136, 139–141, 142–143, 158–159.
9. Derrida 1973: 129–130, 134, 136–137, 139, 142–143.
10. *D'idole et la distance* is translated into English by Thomas A. Carlson as *The Idol and Distance* (New York: Fordham University, 2001).
11. Marion 2001: 134.
12. Marion 2001: 148.
13. Marion 2001: 147.

14. Marion 2001: 148.
15. Marion 2001: 148.
16. Marion 2001: 149.
17. Marion 2001: 161.
18. Marion 2001: 161–162.
19. Marion 2001: 162–163.
20. Marion 2001: 163.
21. Marion 2001: 164.
22. Marion 2001: 170.
23. Marion 2001: 169.
24. Marion 2001: 171, 176.
25. Marion 2001: 184.
26. Marion 2001: 226.
27. Marion 2001: 230 n.41.
28. Marion 2001: 227. Here and below, all italicizes are preserved from the original text (i.e. not added by me).
29. Marion 2001: 228–229.
30. Marion 2001: 230.
31. This essay was originally delivered as a lecture for a colloquium in Jerusalem. It was later published as ‘Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations’, in *Psyché: Invention de l’autre*, 535–595 (Paris: Galilée, 1987). The English translation by Ken Frieden is in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds Howard Coward and Toby Foshay, 73–142 (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).
32. Derrida 1992: 77, 79.
33. Derrida 1992: 77, 79.
34. Derrida 1992: 79.
35. Derrida 1992: 80.
36. Derrida 1992: 81.
37. Derrida 1992: 82.
38. Derrida 1992: 73.
39. Derrida 1992: 84–85.
40. Derrida 1992: 97.
41. Derrida 1992: 97.
42. Derrida 1992: 98.
43. Derrida 1992: 98.
44. Derrida 1992: 98.
45. Derrida 1992: 75.
46. Plato, *Republic* 509 and *Timaeus* 48e. The term *khôra* (space, receptacle) signifies for Derrida the absolute negation of presence, being, or meaning, which is the precondition for all these things.
47. Derrida 1992: 110–111.
48. Derrida 1992: 111.
49. Derrida 1992: 111.
50. Derrida 1992: 111.
51. Derrida 1992: 111.
52. Derrida 1992: 117.
53. Derrida 1992: 117.
54. Derrida 1992: 117.

55. Derrida 1992: 131.
56. Note that much of this discussion appears in Derrida's notes. See especially notes 2, 9, and 16 of Derrida 1992.
57. Derrida 1992: 90.
58. Derrida 1992: 137 n.16.
59. Derrida 1992: 137 n.16.
60. Derrida 1992: 134, n.9
61. Marion's presentation was later published in 1999 as 'In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of "Negative Theology"', in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, 20–42 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1909). Note that although the introduction to this collection calls Derrida and Marion's exchange 'their first public exchange' (1), Derrida's response to Marion calls it 'one of the very first opportunities we have had to discuss these issues publicly, and certainly the first in a foreign language' (42); see, respectively, John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, 'Introduction: Apology for the Impossible: Religion and Postmodernism,' in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, 1–19 (Bloomington, N: Indiana University Press, 1999); and 'Derrida's Response to Marion' in Marion, 'In the Name'.
62. Marion 1999: 22.
63. Marion 1999: 22.
64. Marion 1999: 22.
65. Marion 1999: 23.
66. Marion 1999: 27.
67. Marion 1999: 27.
68. Marion 1999: 27.
69. Marion 1999: 27.
70. Marion 1999: 28.
71. Marion 1999: 28–29.
72. Marion 1999: 29.
73. Marion 1999: 29.
74. Marion 1999: 30.
75. Marion 1999: 30.
76. Marion 1999: 30.
77. Marion 1999: 32.
78. Marion 1999: 35.
79. Marion 1999: 36.
80. Marion 1999: 36.
81. Marion 1999: 37.
82. Marion 1999: 39. Note that Marion believes that phenomenology cannot make any decision about the actuality of such a phenomenon; see Marion 1999: 39.
83. Marion 1999: 39, 40.
84. Marion 1999: 40.
85. Marion 1999: 40.
86. For textual evidence to support this and the following interpretations, see Knepper 2013.
87. Marion 2001: 151.
88. Note also that appealing to 'performative utterances' in order to escape the strictures of predicative language is just bad philosophy of language.

89. For four other analyses of the Derrida and Marion debate with regard to Dionysius, see Bradley 2000; Caputo 1999; Carlson 1998; Rubenstein 2008.

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## CHAPTER 39

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# DIONYSIUS AS A MYSTIC

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YSABEL DE ANDIA TRANSLATED BY MARK EDWARDS

Is Dionysius a mystic? Since we do not know the person who conceals himself under the pseudonym Dionysius the Areopagite, we can answer this question only on the basis of his writings, and then we shall be able to say what it is to be a ‘mystic’.

The Dionysian commentators of the twentieth century, principally Jules Gross<sup>1</sup>, Jan Vanneste,<sup>2</sup> and Charles-Henri Puech<sup>3</sup>, tax Dionysius with speaking of the mystical without having the ‘mystical experience’. The position of René Roques is more careful to take account of the opinion of Dionysius himself: ‘Dionysius chooses to be a theorist of mystical union, and nothing is more foreign to his manner than the composition of an intimate journal or confessions’<sup>4</sup>.

One ought to ask oneself at the outset whether the mystical is indistinguishable from mystical experience or whether it might not be possible to think of the mystical in the light of its object—Henri de Lubac<sup>5</sup> defines mysticism as ‘the lived mystery’—and not in the light of its subject<sup>6</sup>.

Dionysius does not speak directly of experience, but of ‘suffering things divine’ with regard to his master Hierotheus and rather than speaking of experience (a term that he never employs), he speaks of union (ἔνωσις)<sup>7</sup> with the Deity, as in the *Divine Names*, or with the One (πρὸς ἓν), as in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, or again of being united (ἐνοῦμενος) with God in the divine Darkness, as in the *Mystical Theology*. Above all, however, he develops the paths to the attainment of mystical union: these are the three ways in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, sacramental mystagogy in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*; the ascent of Sinai and entry into the darkness in the *Mystical Theology*.

The models for the ‘mystical’—no less for Dionysius, who claims to be Paul’s convert on the Areopagus (Acts 17:33), than for the subsequent tradition—are Moses and Paul, and it is above all in their terms that Dionysius defines what it is to ‘be mystical’.

## HIEROTHEUS: ‘TO SUFFER THINGS DIVINE’

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In the eulogy that he pronounces in the second chapter of the *Divine Names*, on his master Hierotheus<sup>8</sup>, Dionysius writes that the latter ‘not only knew but experienced



things divine' (οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα) (DN 648 B).<sup>9</sup> The excellence of Hierotheus as a 'knower' of things divine arises from the fact that his knowledge of God was inseparable from his experience of God. This relation between knowledge and experience, or rather 'suffering', is present in Greek literature, above all in the tragedians<sup>10</sup>.

## Knowledge and Experience

The antecedent of the Dionysian παθὼν τὰ θεῖα<sup>11</sup> would seem to be the famous dictum of Aristotle on the Mysteries: τοὺς τελουμένους οὐ μαθεῖν δεῖ ἀλλὰ παθεῖν: 'The initiates ought not to learn something but undergo emotions'. This is a fragment of the *Περὶ φιλοσοφίας* (n° 15)<sup>12</sup> transmitted by Synesius of Cyrene in his *Dion* (10.48 a). This passage is a brief judgement by Aristotle on the activity demanded of those who are initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis. The classic opposition μαθεῖν—παθεῖν which Aristotle takes up here, would seem to correspond, for Synesius of Cyrene<sup>13</sup>, to that between factual knowledge and mystical initiation where emotion gives the force of adherence to the mysteries which are being represented. Initiation does not belong to the order of words or instruction, but to that of spectacle or contemplation. That is why instruction (μάθησις) is opposed to initiation (τελείωσις), as activity to passivity and speech to the ineffable.

### *Tradition, Seeking, and Initiation*

When, in the second chapter of the *Divine Names*, Dionysius takes up the Greek topos μαθεῖν-παθεῖν to characterize his master Hierotheus, he does not take it up in the form of an absolute opposition—οὐ μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα, as in the Aristotelian fragment—but in the form of a weakened opposition: οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα. The sense is modified by the addition of μόνον. The point is that Hierotheus, more than any other person, has honoured the mysteries of the preternatural nature of Jesus:

'These things', says Dionysius, 'our illustrious master has celebrated in his *Elements of Theology* in an utterly preternatural fashion, whether (1) it was from the sainted theologians that this man received them, or whether (2) he beheld them at the end of his astute investigations of the *Oracles*, having devoted much time and labour to this task, or whether (3) he was initiated by a more divine inspiration, *not only knowing but suffering things divine*, and as a consequence of his sympathy with them<sup>14</sup>, if one may use such a word, was rendered perfect in a mysterious union and faith in those things that cannot be taught (DN 648 A–B).

There is no question here of a cultural initiation of Hierotheus, comparable to the initiations into pagan mysteries, but of his knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation, of the formation of Jesus (Ἰησοῦ θεοπλαστία), inexpressible as this is, and of all the things which pertain to his marvellous nature (Ἰησοῦ φυσιολογία) (DN 648 A). 'These things' were known by Hierotheus in three different ways. The triple repetition

εἴτε... εἴτε... εἴτε... does not signify three possibilities, but rather the succession of three distinct activities:

- a) First there is a reception of the divine oracles by means of the sainted authors' (θεολόγοι) preternatural nature. This is the stage of the handing down of the sacred books.
- b) The synoptic apprehension of Scripture or of theology comes at the end of an astute investigation (ἐπιστημονικὴ ἔρευνα) after much expense of labour (γυμνασία) and time. This is the stage of the exegete's intellectual activity.
- c) But there is also a direct initiation by a more divine inspiration (θειοτέρα ἐπίπνοια) which accompanies the activity of investigation or replaces it. The mystagogue is the Holy Spirit who inspires the Scriptures and who by his power, not by human wisdom (cf. DN 588 A), causes us to cleave to the realities or to the mysteries which theology reveals.

It is at the end of these three stages—reception of Scripture, investigation, and the apprehension of its meaning and initiation into the divine mystery—that, according to Dionysius, Hierotheus 'not only knew but equally suffered these things divine'. Now this 'suffering' is immediately explained as a 'sympathy'<sup>15</sup>. By sympathy with 'things divine' (τὰ θεῖα), the mystical union which is not taught and faith are consummated in a perfect manner. Just as it was the power of the Spirit that effected the union with ineffable realities, so it is the sympathy with 'things divine' that renders perfect both faith in them and union with them.

To express the union, Dionysius employs terms formed with the prefix συν: συνάπτω: 'to be conjoined or united, to adhere to'; and συμπάθεια: 'to suffer with'. Touching and suffering are sensations or passions which do not belong to the order of rationality or discourse, but which, for that reason, translate the immediacy of the lived experience. Only this immediacy can correspond to the union with the One, discourse and factual knowledge being once again of the order of multiplicity<sup>16</sup> and mediation. The word παθεῖν denotes a mode of knowing things divine which does not pass, like μάθησις, through the medium of discourse; in this sense, it signifies not so much suffering in itself as the immediacy of the union or human passivity in the presence of God.

One may also wonder if human passion, which is always characterized in a negative manner by Dionysius, does not acquire, like 'suffering', a positive value in relation to the Passion of Christ.

## Things Divine and the Passion of the Word

The 'things divine' to which DN 648 B refers are the incarnation and the preternatural nature of Jesus. Thus it is in a Christological context that Dionysius affirms of Hierotheus that he 'not only knew but also suffered things divine'. Now he says above: 'Only the superessential Word assumed for us our own substance in wholeness and truth; by his

activity as by his passion' (καὶ δρᾶσαι καὶ παθεῖν) (DN 644 C). By παθεῖν he means here the Passion of the Word 'according to our own substance'. Certainly this παθεῖν leaves his own nature intact. For in his 'philanthropy', the thearchic Goodness 'unites himself with our lowliness while giving up nothing of his own nature, without undergoing any mixture, without suffering any indignity' (EH 441 B). Or again: 'with no diminution of his transcendent fulness' (DN 649 A). This παθεῖν is the instrument of redemption. Jésus 'during his Passion, implores the Father's forgiveness' (EP 8, 1096 B); and he says, in a vision, to Carpus: 'Behold, I am ready to suffer anew for the salvation of humanity (ὕπὲρ ἀνθρώπων ἀνασωζομένων παθεῖν) and I would bear it with great joy, if I could thus prevent humans from sinning' (EP 8, 1100 C).

Finally it is Redemption that 'ransoms the passions' (DN 897 B). Nevertheless, human passions are always mingled with corruption, and the condition of the divine man, like that of the angels, is immunity to passion.

The mystical experience of Hierotheus is therefore founded on:

- a) Scripture;
- b) but also on a 'more divine inspiration' of the Holy Spirit;
- c) which makes him 'suffer things divine', that is to say, the incarnation and the Passion of the Word.

It is thus scriptural (reception), pneumatological, and Christological.

On the other hand, this experience of Hierotheus is normative. In speaking of Hierotheus, Dionysius speaks of himself and of every Christian. There is no mystical life for a Christian which is not founded on the word of Scripture and the liturgy ('the sacred mysteries'), on the Holy Spirit who inspires the Scriptures and the reader of the Scriptures, and who is the mystagogue of the sacred mysteries, and on the Christ to whom the disciple is assimilated.

The mystical finds its consummation in mystical union with God. To arrive at this end, however, one must pass through the stages, namely the three paths<sup>17</sup> in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, one must be initiated into the sacred mysteries, as in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, or must mount by degrees, as in the *Mystical Theology*.

## THE THREE WAYS: PURIFICATION, ILLUMINATION, AND UNION

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The *Celestial Hierarchy* commences with two citations, one from the Epistle of St James—'Every good gift, every perfect blessing, comes from on high and descends from the Father of lights' (James 1.17)—to indicate the origin of every gift, and one from the Epistle to the Romans—'everything is from him and for him' (Romans 9,36)—to indicate its purpose. For the procession is duplicated by a conversion:

Every procession which, at the Father's initiative, reveals his light to us by its generous visitation, also exerts a unifying power in its reversion, which causes us to strain for that which is above, converting us to the unity and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us to him (CH I, 1, 121 A).

This descending movement of grace or deification, and ascending movement of the action of grace or contemplation, characterizes the whole of the spiritual or mystical life, according to Dionysius. And the 'hierarchy', both celestial and ecclesiastic, is a 'sacred order, a science, an activity', whose 'goal is, so far as is possible, an assimilation to and union with God' (CH 165 A).

Thus, I believe, it is necessary that those who receive the *purification* be totally free of all mixture and exempt from every alloy of unlikeness—that those who receive the *illumination* be filled with light divine and raised, by the perfectly pure gaze of their spirit, right up to the state and power of contemplation,—and that those who receive *perfection*, having abandoned the deficient, be admitted to participation in the perfective science of the sacred mysteries, of which they have enjoyed the highest contemplation (CH 165 C–D).

Every spirit or intelligence (the νόες) participates, to an unequal degree, in three operations: 'Each becomes a participant, in the measure permitted to each and in accordance with one's capacity, in the purification which surpasses all purity, in the superabundant light, and in the perfection which precedes all perfective initiation' (CH 284 A). One receives purification, illumination, and perfection and, in turn, one transmits them (165 D–168 A). Thus there is a 'cooperation with God', 'to the end that those spirits who love God imitate him according to their capacity' (CH 168 A). The perfection of the spirits who love (φιλοθέοι νόες) is therefore imitation (μίμησις) of God and cooperation with God (θεία συνεργία). The mention of love redirects us to the *Hymns of Love* attributed to Hierotheus, where Eros moves the 'lovers of God' in their transcendent rapture.

In sum, hierarchy is 'the constant love of God and things divine, which operates sacredly in the unifying presence of God' (ἡ πρὸς θεόν τε καὶ τὰ θεία προσεχῆς ἀγάπησις ἐνθέως τε καὶ ἐνιαίως ἱερουργουμένη) (EH 376 A)—and, conversely, love has a hierarchic structure in the *Hymns of Love* of Hierotheus: 'By love (ἔρως), we understand a power of and binding which prompts the *superior* beings to exercise their providence with regard to their inferiors, those of equal rank to maintain their mutual relations, and the inferiors to turn towards the more potent and superior' (DN 713 A–B).

Love is the unifying power of the hierarchy.

This division between purification, illumination, and union is found again in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which distinguishes the 'purified', penitents, energumens, and catechumens, the 'illuminated', that is, the 'baptized', and the 'perfects', identified with the monks.

## INITIATION AND DIVINIZATION

### Initiation

For Dionysius, mystical experience is not uniquely individual; it is inscribed inextricably in a hierarchical order through which one receives 'the initiation of sacred mystagogy (τῆς ἱερᾶς μυσταγωγίας τὴν τελετὴν) in succession to those who have been initiated into the mysteries and hierarchical traditions (μυστηρίων καὶ παραδόσεων τετελεσμένοις)' (EH I, 1, 372 A). One cannot know the mysteries without the 'initiations into mystagogy' which cause us to enter these mysteries and permit us to contemplate them:

In raising the eyes (ἀναβλέψαντες) to the resplendent light (αὐγὴν) of Jesus, blissful and truly thearchic, having been initiated (ἐποπτεύσαντες) to contemplate that which offers itself to our eyes, illumined (ἐλλαμφθέντες) by the knowledge of these spectacles, we shall be able to consecrate ourselves to the mystical science (τὴν μυστικὴν ἐπιστήμην) and to consecrate others to it (372 B).

Dionysius is speaking of himself and of the priests who transmit the 'mystical science' and indicates the steps that lead to it: a) the raising of our sight to the dazzling light of Jesus who is the 'foundation and end of all hierarchy' (EH 373 B); b) the indispensable initiation to contemplation; and c) illumination through the knowledge of these spectacles. To speak of initiation Dionysius employs the verb ἐποπτεύω<sup>18</sup> which denotes vision such as supervenes on initiation into the Greek mysteries and also the epoptic sense of the Scriptures in Origen.<sup>19</sup>

Moses as 'visionary' received 'the fulness of divine illumination and a certain *sacred initiation* into something of the very mysteries of God' (CH 180 C–D). At the beginning of chapter 5 of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, on the priestly orders, Dionysius repeats the threefold division of every hierarchy: 'the most divine sacraments (τελετάς), the beings who, living in God, know these sacraments, and become the initiators into them, and finally those whom they sacredly initiate' (EH 501 A). The celestial hierarchy, he continues, 'has as its sacrament (τελετή) this immaterial intellection of God and of the divine mysteries which appertain to him as his own' (501 A), while for the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the sacrament is 'the elevation of souls to worship in the spirit' (ἡ πρὸς τὴν πνευματικὴν λατρείαν ἀναγωγή). Thus it is that he presents Moses as 'the first initiator and first leader of the high priests':

In this legal hierarchy, the sacrament is the elevation of souls to worship in the spirit. Those who initiate into this worship are the persons whom Moses himself, the first initiator and first leader (μύστης<sup>20</sup> καὶ ἡγεμὼν) of the high priests, according to the Law, conducted as initiates (μνηθέντες) to the mystery of the sacred tabernacle (τὴν ἁγίαν ἱερὰν σκηνὴν) (Exod. 26:30), when he wrote on this sacred tabernacle, for the instruction of others, the sacred institutions of the legal hierarchy, declaring all the

priestly institutions to be images of this model (εἰκόνα τύπου) which had revealed itself to him on Mount Sinai (Exod. 25:40). As for the initiates, these are the ones whom the legal symbols elevate, according to their efficacy, to a much more perfect *initiation* (EH V, 2, 501 C).

Dionysius interprets God's commands to Moses with respect to the construction of the sanctuary, its ministers, and its order—'Behold and act according to the model that has been shown to you on the mountain' (Exod. 25:40 and 26:30—as initiations of Moses by God.

Finally initiation implies the deification of the one who is initiated:

Every hierarchic leader, in the measure appropriate to his being, his role and his station, can on the one hand receive initiation into divine secrets and obtain deification, and on the other hand transmit to those who come after him, according to the merit of each, a part of that sacred deification which he has received from God himself (EH 372 D–373 A).

## Deification

One understands nothing about the mystical in Dionysius if one does not perceive the importance in him, as in the tradition of the Greek Fathers, of deification or divinization. In fact this term θέωσις is found chiefly in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, for it is the different 'mysteries' or sacraments that effect the divinization of humanity. The mystical in Dionysius comes before all liturgy.

Dionysius gives a definition of deification: 'deification is, so far as is possible, likeness to and union with God' (ἡ δὲ θέωσις ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις) (376 A), a definition similar to the one that he gives of hierarchy: 'the proper object (σκοπός) of our hierarchy is to make us like God and unite us with him, so far as is possible (ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ἡμῶν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις)' (392 A).

He also offers a portrait of 'the man perfectly divine (ὁ καθόλου θεῖος ἀνὴρ), he who is 'worthy to enter into communion with the divine realities,' and who:

having attained the loftiest deification (θέωσις) that he can obtain, will be altogether the Temple and the companion of the thearchic Spirit, grounding his likeness (ἀφομοίωσις) on that very One whose likeness he has become. Far from ever succumbing to the effects of the illusions and bugbears of the adversary, he will easily make light of them, and if they present themselves he will repel them and give chase (433 C).

This divine human is 'the temple of the Spirit' and 'like' Christ, and because he is so he is able to repel the adversary, the devil, as Jesus did when tempted in the wilderness. Christian asceticism is grounded in Christ. 'He will therefore,' Dionysius continues,

‘be more active than passive, and he who has made impassibility and fortitude the constant law of his nature will also be seen to be such a physician as to help others in their struggles with the same temptations’ (433 C). To communicate what one has received is of the essence of tradition and hierarchy, and the image of the physician looks back to Christ the physician.

The second characteristic is the union (ἔνωσις) (392 B) with God which takes effect in baptism (φωτισμός), described as the ‘sacrament of unity’ (397 C), and in communion, the ‘mystery of mysteries’ or ‘sacrament of sacraments’ (424 C), which ‘receives the name of communion (κοινωνία τε καὶ σύναξις), even though ‘every sacramental operation consists in unifying our fractured lives by deifying them, to gather into divine conformity all that is divided in us, and causing us thereby to enter into communion and union with the One (πρὸς τὸ ἓν)’<sup>21</sup>.

The monk is *par excellence* the unified human being. ‘The rite (of monastic consecration) signifies that perfect philosophy which confers on monks the knowledge of the precepts through which every life becomes one ... for when their life is unified, it is a duty for them not to be other than one with the One, to unite themselves with the holy unity’ (EH VI, *Theoria* 2, 533 D). The ‘perfect philosophy’ is the monastic life which ‘imitates’ the priestly life.

## Divine Generation

Dionysius gives another definition of divinization: it is a ‘divine generation’ or a ‘divine birth’. The word ‘generation’ conveys better than ‘birth’ which is momentary, this conception and this slow formation of the deified being. It is not a question of ‘the birth of God in us’, as Maurice de Gandillac translates it, but of their divine generation. Dionysius develops this image of generation with respect to the catechumens, who, if they do not reach the end of their formation, are ‘living-dead abortions’ (433 A).

Divinization is effected through the love of God.

There is a double movement of divine love: God moves us towards him, and he moves externally in inspiring the sacred activities of worship. What is primary, says Dionysius with reference to the *Hymns of Love* by his ‘illustrious master’, Hierotheus (DN IV, 15–17), is ‘the love of God which moves towards the divine’ (ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα πρωτίστη κίνησις ἢ ἀγάπησις ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ) (EH 392 A), or ‘the steadfast love of God and the divine mysteries’ (EH 376 A). But ‘since this love displays itself externally’ in worship, ‘that which constitutes the foundation of this process (πρόοδος), is the absolutely ineffable operation through which we are perfectly deified (ἡ τοῦ εἶναι θείως ἡμᾶς ἀρρητοτάτη δημιουργία). *In sum, to be deified is a divine generation* (τὸ γὰρ εἶναι θείως ἢ θεία γέννησις)’ (EH 392 A–B).

This generation or this birth is the one of which Jesus speaks to Nicodemus: ‘Without being born from above, no one can see the kingdom of God’ (John 3:3). And as being is prior to acting, a human being cannot put into practice the truths received from



God, if it has not first been granted to him to 'exist divinely' (ὑπάρχειν ἐνθέως) (EH 392 B).

'Hence', says Dionysius, 'let us be initiated into the divine symbols of divine birth' (ἐξῆς δὲ τὰ θεῖα τῆς θεογενεσίας ἐποπτεύσαμεν σύμβολα) (392 B), for there will be as many symbols of 'divine birth' (EH 397 A; 404 C; 425 A; 484 B) as of myseries.

## MOSES AND PAUL

Both<sup>22</sup> Moses (Μωϋσῆς)<sup>23</sup> and Paul (Παῦλος)<sup>24</sup> are the 'divine humans', the two models of the 'mystical' in Dionysius the Areopagite, as in all Christian literature. To speak of Moses or Paul is to define the mystical experience as Dionysius understands this, or in a certain manner lives it.

Moses is the prophet of the Exodus who had a 'theological' experience, while the Apostle Paul had a 'Christological' experience: God spoke to one in a dark cloud, and Christ spoke to the other from the height of heaven on the road to Damascus. Dionysius recalls the narrative of Exodus 19 in the *Mystical Theology*, putting himself in the footsteps of the lives of Moses by Philo of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa; and it is in the words of Paul himself—'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20), that he comments in the *Divine Names* on the Pauline mystery.

This essay will follow the ascent of Moses to God in the *Mystical Theology*, before entering into Paul's relation with Christ in the *Divine Names*, and finally to comment on what is common to both: love and ecstasy.

### Moses

The prayer to the Trinity which opens the *Mystical Theology* defines what Dionysius understands by 'mystical theology'. He entreats the Trinity to lead us 'there where the simple, absolute, and immutable mysteries of theology have been buried in the superluminous Darkness of the silence'<sup>25</sup> which is the initiator of the secret' (MT 997). In 'mystical theology', the mysteries of theology are 'buried in the Darkness'; they are not the object of any speech, but of silence, which is the sole initiator of the secret, for the sole initiation into mystical theology is silence.

Dionysius desires to enter into this Darkness which he defines as 'the most stupendous light'—Darkness by excess of light—and this light 'swells the intellect's whose eyes are closed with the splendours of all beauty (τοὺς ἀνομμάτους νόας)' (MT 997 B). Ἀνομμάτος, the one whose eyes have closed or who is without eyes: this term which Dionysius has borrowed from Plotinus and Proclus characterizes among the Greeks the love that is blind.<sup>26</sup>

In the *Mystical Theology* the knowDaring subject, whom we shall designate the Moses-intellect, becomes 'blind'. The entry into the Darkness is accompanied by that which the later mystics will call the 'binding of the senses'.

The address to Timothy is a prayer which is an entreaty for divine grace that has a second function as a recommendation from Dionysius to Timothy to engage in 'mystical contemplations (τῇ περὶ τὰ μυστικά θεάματα συντόνῳ διατριβῇ)'. The recommendation is at once positive and negative: 'renounce at the same time the senses and the intellectual activities (καὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἀπόλειπε καὶ τὰς νοερὰς ἐνεργείας), all that is sensible and all that is intelligible, all that is and all that is not, and elevate yourself, so far as is possible, in unknowing towards the union with Him who is above all essence and knowledge' (MT I, 1, 997 B).

Dionysius employs two imperatives: ἀπόλειπε, 'abandon' and ἀνατάθητι, 'elevate yourself'. The expressions ἀπόλειπε (MT 997 B) and further on πάντα ἀφελών (MT 1000 A) look back to the injunction of Plotinus to one who wishes to be a philosopher: ἄφελε πάντα, 'strip away all things' (*Enn.* V 3 [49] 17,38), at the end of the treatise *On the Knowing Hypostases and that which is beyond*, and to the *Republic* of Plato (VII, 594 b8–c1).

Renunciation is preceded by a 'spiritual exercise'<sup>27</sup>, the *diatribe*<sup>28</sup>, which renders it possible. The 'mystical contemplations' (τὰ μυστικά θεάματα) are therefore already higher than the 'sensations' and the 'intellectual activities' and it is by a 'sustained application' of these that the renunciation of the sensible and intelligible, and even of being and non-being, is possible. On the other hand, the 'elevation' is a 'straining' towards union with 'Him who is above all essence and all knowledge'. This union is effected 'in an unknowable manner' or 'in unknowing': ἀγνώστως. This is the goal that is set before Timothy and fixed in the *Mystical Theology*. Nevertheless, the elevation requires an ecstasy:

For it is by an ecstasy wholly unbound and detached (τῇ ἀπολύτῳ καθαρῶς ἐκστάσει) from all and from yourself that you will be raised to the superessential radiance of the divine Darkness, after having put all things away and having detached yourself from all (MT 1000 A).

The renunciation of all (πάντα ἀφελών) and of oneself cannot be effected if one is not elevated by an ecstasy detached 'from yourself and from all' (ἐαυτοῦ καὶ πάντων). These are the terms which he will take up again with respect to Moses. In fact, Dionysius interprets the gnoseological ascent in the terms of the book of Exodus, even before Moses himself is advanced as the model of mystical 'initiation'.

In this ascent, the spirits 'traverse (διαβαίνουσι) all things, ( ... ) surpass (ὑπερβαίνουσι) every ascent of all summits, leave behind (ἀπολμπάνουσι) the lights, sounds, and words of heaven, and penetrate (εἰσδυσόμενοι) the Darkness, where in truth, as the Oracles say, He who is above all' is found (MT I, 1000 C). God is named as 'the One above all', which is the last word of the *Mystical Theology*.

Likewise, concerning the ascent of Moses:

the divine Moses receives the command to purify himself (ἀποκαθαρθῆναι πρῶτον αὐτός)—and to separate himself all the more (ἀφορισθῆναι) from those who are not pure—after all purification, he hears (ἀκούει) the trumpets of many voices and perceives (ὁρᾷ) numerous scintillating lights of pure radiance which flow from all sides—then he separates himself (ἀφορίζεται) from the multitude—and, with the chosen priests, he hastens (φθάνει) towards the summit of the divine ascent—even there he does not encounter God (κάν τούτοις αὐτῷ μὲν οὐ συγγίνεται τῷ θεῷ) himself, and that which he contemplates there is not Himself (οὐκ αὐτόν), since he is invisible (ἀθέατος γάρ), but the place in which he dwells (τὸν τόπον, οὗ ἔσται) (MT 1000 C–D).

Dionysius follows the order of the narrative in Exodus (19:16–25), but, in contrast to Gregory of Nyssa in the *Life of Moses*, he distinguishes, ‘the place in which God dwells’, which encompasses the ‘conjectural reasonings’ of the world, and the divine Darkness. For the end of the ascent is not yet the entry into the Darkness which is the final stage. There is still an ultimate ‘liberation’, namely from vision. This is the transition from the rationality of the world to the transcendence of God with respect to the world and the spirits:

And so (Moses) liberates himself (ἀπολύεται) even from those beings that see and are seen, and he penetrates (εἰσδύνει) into **the truly mystical Darkness of unknowing**<sup>29</sup> [All emphasis mine], according to which he puts to silence (καθ’ ὃν ἀπομύει) all the cognitive apprehensions and finds himself (γίνεται) in that which is wholly intangible and invisible, belonging (ὦν) entirely to Him who is above all (ὁ πάντων ἐπέκεινα), and to no (other), neither himself nor anyone else, but united (ἐνούμενος)<sup>30</sup>, in a superior mode, to Him who is completely unknowable through the suspension of all knowledge and through a knowing that is superior to intellect by dint of knowing nothing (γινώσκων ὑπὲρ νοῦν) (MT 1001 A).

The verbs which signify the relation of man and God in the Darkness are: ‘to find oneself in’ (γίνεται ἐν), ‘to belong’ or ‘being’ (ὦν), ‘being united’ (ἐνούμενος), and ‘knowing’ (γινώσκων). We find the same phrasal structure again for the human spirit (with regard to Timothy) and for Moses who is its model:

(MT 997 B)

- a) elevate yourself, by unknowing (ἀγνώστως)
- b) towards union (πρὸς ἔνωσιν), so far as is possible,
- c) with Him who is above all essence and knowledge.

MT 1001 A:

- a) united, in a superior mode (κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον)
- b) to Him who is completely unknowable
- c) by the suspension of all knowledge.

The central intuition of the *Mystical Theology* is this union with God is union with an unknown, or with The Unknown. This is the intuition that St Thomas Aquinas takes up when he says that one unites oneself with God not only as with an unknown, but inasmuch as he is unknown: *tanquam ignotum*<sup>31</sup>. It is not only a question of the unknowing (ἄγνωσία) of the spirit but of *him* who is totally unknown (ὁ παντελῶς ἄγνωστος).

And yet this unknowing is a knowing: 'a knowing that is superior to intellect by dint of not knowing' (καὶ τῷ μὴδὲν γινώσκειν ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκων). Dionysius repeats this several times: '... It is by dint of not seeing and not knowing that this person elevates himself in all truth above all vision and all knowledge' (EP V, 1073 A); and 'This is why God is known at once in all things and apart from all things. God is known by virtue of both knowing and unknowing' (DN VII, 3, 872 A).

He places himself in the tradition of Plotinus: 'It [the intellect] sees without seeing anything and thus it is that sees most truly' (*Enn.* V 5 [32] 7, 31), and of Gregory of Nyssa: 'He [Moses] travels further and further towards the interior until he penetrates, by the exertion of spirit, all the way to the invisible and unknowable and there beholds God' (*Life of Moses* II, 163; GNO 87). But in Dionysius, there is no 'vision', God is 'totally intangible and invisible' and the spirit is blind and mute, immersed in the silence and obscurity of the 'mystical Darkness'. If one wishes to speak of mystical experience, it would mean this absence of experience, but Dionysius prefers to speak of 'knowledge' rather than of 'experience'.

What is important is the *unio mystica* with God in the Darkness which is the object of prayer. It is a question of union with 'Him who is above all' (ὁ πάντων ἐπέκεινα), by going out 'from all': it is the climb from *négation* to *négation* towards 'Him who is above all affirmation and negation', and by going out 'from oneself': this is what the ecstasy in God is.

## Paul

The 'divine Paul'<sup>32</sup> or the 'great Paul' (DN 713 A) is named seven times in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. He is the master of Hierotheus<sup>33</sup> (DN 681 A) and the adversary of Elymas the sorcerer (DN 893 B). He causes the knowledge of the 'true philosophy', which is to say the 'Wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 2:7) (EP 7, 1080 B), because, according to Romans 1:20, he reveals 'the things invisible through the visible' (EP 9,2, 1108 B) and he is a 'theologian' (DN 893 B), because, having known the 'divine mysteries', he dispenses 'the truly solid food' (Heb. 5:14) to those who believe (EP 9,4, 1112 A). Finally he is the one who speaks to the Athenians of the 'unknown God' (Acts 17:23).

Dionysius may also be evoking the revelations that Paul received on the road to Damascus when he says: 'It is in this sense that one says of the divine Paul that he knew God, that he knew that God transcends every act of intelligence and every mode of knowledge' (EP 5, 1073 A). In that case, the rapture of Paul would be the actual experience of the transcendence of God, but Dionysius does not speak, as Paul does, of 'ineffable words' (1 Cor. 12:4).

But it is above all as a model of ecstatic *eros* that Paul is mentioned in chapter IV of the *Divine Names* with respect to 'the divine love (θεῖος ἔρως) (which) is ecstatic (ἐκστατικός)<sup>34</sup>, not permitting the lovers to belong to themselves, but to those whom they love' (712 A). Ecstasy is not a transient rapture or a soaring of the affections, but the demand and, as one might say, the constitutive law of divine love. The test of the ecstatic force of love is that it impels beings to go out from themselves to be the providence (πρόνοια) of their inferiors, the mutual cohesion (συννοχή) of those who are equal, and the conversion (ἐπιστροφή) to their superiors of those who are inferior (712 A). The *dunamis* of love has a hierarchic structure. Thus it is that Dionysius takes Paul for an example:

This is why the great Paul<sup>35</sup>, possessed by divine love and having received a share in this ecstatic power, says from his inspired mouth: 'I live, but no longer I; it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2:20); as a 'true lover' who has gone out of himself, as he himself says (2 Cor. 5:13), for God, no longer living his own life (2 Cor. 5:15), but that of Him whom he loves as his much beloved (DN IV, 712 A) Emphases mine.

Ecstasy has a Christological reference in Dionysius, which has not been sufficiently noted, and the divine *eros* is not absent from the ecstasy of Moses—'belonging entirely to Him who is above all and to no other, neither himself nor anyone else, but united, in a superior mode, to Him who is completely unknowable' (MT I, 1000 A) —contrary to those who say that there is no place for love in the *Mystical Theology*.

Paul is styled as 'true lover' because he no longer belongs to himself and because he is possessed by Christ. The implied opposition is between Paul and Socrates who is likewise styled as 'true lover' in Proclus' *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*<sup>36</sup>. Only the direction of the love has changed: here it is not the master but the disciple who is called 'true lover'. In this ecstasy, in which he has gone out of himself, Paul is 'possessed' by the divine *eros* which does not allow him to belong to himself, and in Dionysius there is no ecstasy or going out of oneself, without possession by another: this is the union with God, the end of the ascent of Moses, and the fool's wisdom of Paul, which is perceived and 'beyond perception'.

This law of divine love—that one no longer belongs to oneself but goes out of oneself through love, is that of God himself (DN IV, 712 B). The Cause of all, through love of all beings 'goes out' of itself by its exercise of providence, and God 'from his former separateness allows himself to lead' or 'allows himself to entice'. What is in question here is the movement of procession (πρόοδος) of the Cause of all which resides in itself (μονή), for God 'goes out of himself without separating from himself'. This ecstasy of divine *eros* Dionysius styles 'jealousy': God is a jealous *God* (Deut. 5:9)<sup>37</sup>. The ecstatic power of love, which places those who love outside themselves, prevents them from belonging to themselves: thus jealousy is the inverse of ecstasy (cf. DN IV, 712 B).

This ecstasy of God takes place in the 'divine Philanthropy'. Jesus' love for humanity reveals itself first in the incarnation. The two Christological letters, III and IV to Gaius, the therapist, i.e. monk (cf. EH VI,3), speak of the φιλανθρωπία of Jesus.

In that which concerns the love of Christ for humanity (φιλανθρωπία), theology uses this term, I believe, to intimate that the Superessential has renounced his mystery and manifests himself to us by assuming a human essence. In spite of this manifestation—or rather, to speak in a more divine language, at the very heart of this manifestation—he nonetheless preserves his mystery. For the mystery of Jesus remained hidden. What he is like in himself no reason and no intelligence have ever fathomed. Whatever one says of him, he remains inexpressible: however one understands him he remains unknowable (EP III, 1069 A).

The mystery of Jesus is present throughout the whole work of Dionysius.

## CONCLUSION: ECSTASY AND LOVE

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Mystical experience presents itself as a ‘mystagogy’ or a ‘mystical initiation’ whose path is traced and whose justice is validated by its great biblical exemplars, Moses and Paul.

Mystical experience, or more precisely mystical knowledge, is a transformation of the whole person: who is the one who enters into the Darkness? Or how can a human penetrate the Darkness and have knowledge above the intellect? Must one say that it is the intellect that elevates itself above itself or which goes out from itself in that ecstasy of knowledge of the divine unknowing? Likewise St Paul’s affirmation: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*, implies a negation of the ‘me’: *It is no longer I*—and an identification with Christ: *but it is Christ who lives in me*.

And this transformation, or this ecstasy, is affected by *eros*, the love which brings it about that ‘the lover belongs no more to himself but to the beloved’ (DN 712 A), the *eros* which explains how Moses ‘belongs’ entirely to God (MT 1000 A), as Paul of Tarsus belonged to Christ, the *eros* that Hierotheus celebrates in his *Hymns of Love* (DN IV, 15–17), the *eros* which is the passion whereby God is out of himself (καὶ ἐξεστηκώς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός) (EP 9, 1112 C), while remaining all the time in himself (*monè*), in this procession (*proodos*) of the beings which he creates and which he loves, and which return to him in a movement of conversion (*epistrophè*).

It seems that *eros* has a more ecstatic sense than *agapèsis*, of which Dionysius speaks at the beginning of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (EH 376 A, 392 B), but there again, ‘divine *eros*’ (EH 372 B, 565 C) is not absent. And it is love again that determines the rank of each person in the hierarchy, for to those souls which ‘more greatly desire’ the Light ‘vouchsafes itself the more and shines with greater brilliance, because they *have loved much*’, as Dionysius says in the *Divine Names* (DN 701 A), alluding to Christ’s saying about the Magdalen to whom much will be forgiven ‘*because she has loved much*’ (Luke 7:47).

Love imparted according to a hierarchic order is at the heart of the mystical in Dionysius.

## NOTES

1. Gross 1938.
2. Vanneste 1962: 402.
3. Puech 1978: 119–141.
4. Roques 1958: xxxii and 153 col. 1885–1911.
5. De Lubac 1984: 58.
6. Cf. De Andia 2007: 59–109.
7. De Andia 1986.
8. On Hierotheus and Saint Paul, see DN 681 A; 712 A; 865 B; EP 5, 1073 A; 7, 1080 B; 9, 1108 B; 1112 A; Koch 1900: 51. The presentation of Hierotheus, throughout the *Corpus Dionysiacum* as the teacher of its author seems to be part of the general fiction (cf. Sheldon-Williams 1966). Hierotheus has a ‘mystical’ experience which is also ‘liturgical’. The experience of communion is an echo of the eucharistic language of EH III, 425 D, 440 B et 444 A. On ecstasy, or the fact of being taken out of oneself, see DN III, 681 B.
9. Translator’s note: the play on words in the Greek could be captured in English by saying that Hierotheus ‘underwent’ what he ‘understood’.
10. In the tragedians, there is no opposition between knowledge and suffering; on the contrary, suffering is a mode of knowledge. The chorus of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* pronounces a eulogy on Zeus in these terms: ‘He has opened to mortals the paths of prudence by giving them this as a law—to be taught by suffering’ (176–177). ‘To be taught by suffering’ is the great lesson of Aeschylean tragedy, and the chorus of the *Eumenides* will repeat again: ‘it is good to learn to be wise in the school of sorrow’ (*Eumenides* 519–520). Cf. Dörrie 1966: 5–41 and Snell 1973.
11. Cf. De Andia 1992.
12. The fragment of Aristotle adduced by Synesius, *Dion.* 8, which was published by W. D. Ross (*Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta*, Oxford, 1955, p. 84) as fragment 15 of the Περὶ φιλοσοφίας of Aristotle, is now reckoned among the *Dubia* by Gigon 1987: 829 (Frag. 963).
13. Synesius is cited and translated by Croissant 1932: 140–142.
14. ‘Sympathy’ is a term of Neoplatonic theurgy: ‘Each deity has his sympathetic representation in the world, animal, vegetable. or mineral’ (Cf. Dodds 1963: 292; Smith 1974: cf. 90–94).
15. One finds again the same idea of a universe as ‘this one, in sympathy as a whole’ (συμπαθὲς δὴ πᾶν τοῦτο τὸ ἓν) in Plotinus, *Enn.* IV, 4 [28] 32, 13–14. This sympathy which exists between all things as between the parts of an animal which is unique like the universe, is reinforced by the analogy of agent and patient. In *Enn.* IV, 4 [28] 40, 1–6, Plotinus accords to sympathy a magical potency: ‘How can one explain the charms of magic? By sympathy [...] True magic is the “Friendship and Strife” which inhabit things divine in the universe’. At *Enn.* IV, 4, [28] 41, 1–3, he affirms that ‘prayer produces its effects, by the fact that a part of the universe is *in sympathy* with another part, as in the stretched string (of a lyre) where the vibration that comes from below extends itself to the upper region’.
16. Cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* VI, 9 [8] 4, 3–7.
17. This doctrine of the three paths is found in Gregory of Nyssa, for whom the first degree is at the same time purification and illumination, while the third, which is union, is rendered in terms appropriate to the mysteries: cf. Daniélou 1944.
18. The verb ἐποπτεύω is used on numerous occasions (fourteen times) in the EH, six times in the CH, and only twice in DN.
19. In the *Prologue* (ch. 3) of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, puts the three senses of Scripture in parallel with the three disciplines of the Greeks: ethical, physical, epoptic.



20. μύστης: CH 181 A; EH 501 AC; DN 597 A.
21. Πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐνώσει: 393 A; πρὸς τὸ ἔν: II, 5, 401 AB; 8, 404 C; 8, 424 C; III, 424 D; 429 B; 437 A et 10, 440 A; IV, 472 D; VI, 536 A.
22. De Andia 2010.
23. Μωϋσῆς: CH 180 D; EH 501 C; 512 B; DN 700 A; MT 1000C; EP 8, 1084 B.
24. Παῦλος: DN 681 A; 712 A; 893 B; EP 5, 1073 A; EP 7, 1080 B; EP 9, 1108 B, 1112 A.
25. On silence in Dionysius (CH 340 B, DN 589 B, 696 B, 724 B, and MT 997 B), see Pera 1943: 271–272.
26. Cf. Panofsky 1939, chapter 4.
27. Cf. Hadot 1981.
28. On the diatribe, see Capelle/Marrou 1957.
29. On unknowing, see Dodds 1963: 310–313; Norden 1913; Festugière 1953: The studies of Norden, Dodds, and Festugière are ‘the best introduction to the study of the Dionysian concept of ἀγνοσία’, according to Vanneste 1962: 127.
30. Cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* VI 9 [8] 10, 15–17: ‘he has become another, he is no longer himself, belongs entirely to his object and is one with it as though he had caused his own centre to coincide with the universal centre. Even at this point, when they meet, they are no more than one, and are not two but when they separate’.
31. cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Trinitate Boethii*, q. 1, a. 2, *ad 1um*: S.T., Ia Pars, q. 12, a. 13, *ad 1um*; *Contra Gentiles*, Lib. III, cap. 49. Cf. De Andia 2006.
32. DN 681 A, 893 B; EP 5, 1073 A; EP 7, 1080 B; EP 9, 1112 A.
33. The scholiast cites Ps 115,11 and C. Pera, 2 Co 5,13. On ecstasy, see DN 684 C; 693 A; 708 B; 713 A; CH 120 B; 121 B; MT 1000 A; Proclus, in Alc. 63, 12 ss; Maximus, Ambigua 1249 B; Horn 1925; Völker 1954: 1987.
34. Παῦλος: DN 649 D. The perfect participle ἐξεστηκὼν characterizes Paul (cf. 2 Corinthians 5: 13; ἐξεστημεν) who has ‘gone out of himself’ and ‘lives not his own life’ (2 Cor. 5:15), but that of Him whom he loves. The ecstasy of Paul is to live the life of Christ.
35. Proclus, in his *Commentary on the Alcibiades*, calls Socrates ‘the true lover’ (ὁ τῷ ὄντι ἐραστής) (In Alc. 49,16).
36. Exodus 20:5; 34:14.
37. Deuteronomy 5:9; 6:15; Nahum 1.2.

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## CHAPTER 40

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# ON THE THEOLOGY OF DIONYSIUS

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GYÖRGY GERÉBY

## INTRODUCTION: THE DIONYSIAN ENIGMA

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THE author of the Dionysian corpus (henceforth *CD*, *Corpus Dionysiacum* or 'Dionysius')<sup>1</sup> is characterized as a 'sphinx' by Hugo Koch in one of the first modern monographs on this puzzling body of theological writings.<sup>2</sup> A sphinx indeed since the corpus is suffused in seductive enigmas cast in highly artificial language saturated with the complex terminology of contemporary philosophical jargon.

Scholars of the texts encounter a wide variety of puzzles, ranging from the unsolved question of authorship, the time of its composition, its provenance, going as far as the reliability of the textual tradition, a problem highlighted in recent scholarship. No less mysterious is its historical context and purported audience, and lastly, its doctrinal content or theological programme.<sup>3</sup>

This essay leaves the problems of authorship and the textual tradition to more authoritative hands. For the approach here, the identification of the author is of small concern, and for the sake of the argument it is taken for granted that the mainstream tradition of interpretation rests on a particular form of the text which had taken final shape around or after the eighth century.

The extensive *Quellenforschung* has shown that for the author of the *CD* the texts of Proclus, Plato, Plotinus, and even Porphyry offered an apparently legitimate quarry. Future research might identify even more items of the author's library, but the identification of the sources which he exploited liberally for his own *oeuvre* does not, by itself, solve the disquieting question, whether the author was a Hellenistic or Neoplatonic philosopher in Christian garb, or a Christian in Neoplatonic garb?<sup>4</sup>

Not that such source-critical investigations would not be perfectly legitimate. However, the interpreter can easily become fascinated with the heavily laden metaphysical language of the *CD*, resembling the above-mentioned late antique philosophical

authorities. The grand oxymora of ‘being beyond being,’ ‘superessential essence,’ ‘ineffable word,’ or the enticing concepts of *monad*, *triad*, *hierarchy*, *methexis*, *theourgia*, or *henōsis*, are truly mesmerizing. Since these and many other weighty and mysterious terms do indeed dominate the language of the immediate philosophical predecessors of the *CD*, their influence on the doctrinal content yields ready conclusions. Therefore the relation of the *CD* to its non-Christian, often antagonistic pagan environment came to dominate the discussions.

Against the literary and historical approach this essay suggests that the old question cannot be solved without heeding the Wittgensteinian adage that ‘meaning is use.’<sup>5</sup> This approach would allow that in a new context and a new usage the well-known and widely used philosophical terms and phrases get converted and then help to establish and convey the specific Christian message in the form of a ‘polemical parallelism’.

In this essay, however, we look at the methodological debate between Heinrich Dörrie and his critiques, in the hope of highlighting the key issues between the Christian versus Neoplatonic parties. Secondly, we propose a new aspect which has not much concerned the interpreters of the corpus, namely the role of the history of salvation in the *CD*. This seems to be an important subtext of the corpus despite its dominant metaphysical themes. Finally, we look at the role of God as the Lord of the history of salvation. If these aspects are duly appreciated, some vexing questions may be answered somewhat differently.

A *caveat*: we will not attempt to reconstruct the whole of ‘Areopagitic thought,’ or address the problems of ‘mysticism’ or the metaphysics of the ‘divine names.’ ‘Hierarchy’ and ‘negative theology’ will only be touched upon at the end, and only from a particular point of view. This essay hopes to show in the latter parts that the marked presence of a historical understanding of time, understood in biblical terms, that is, a horizontal dimension added to the vertical, might definitely tilt the balance towards the Christian character of the author. (Of course, by *biblical* here, we mean the late antique interpretation of scriptural history.)

## CHRISTIANITY VERSUS PLATONISM?

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It was Heinrich Dörrie who raised the issue of the difference between Neoplatonist and Christian theological ideas in a sharp form.<sup>6</sup> His points—and the ensuing debate—did not concern the *CD* directly, but it provides a good framework for the discussion of theology of the corpus. Dörrie argued that employing certain Platonic elements, that is, formulae and phrases by the Church Fathers does not imply their Platonism. In fact, the subtle changes introduced by them into these elements result rather in the opposite. The ‘Platonisms’ are not embezzlements, or signs of a hidden agenda, but they rather serve to ‘beat the opponents on their home ground.’<sup>7</sup>

Dörrie listed as the main Neoplatonic views antagonistic to Christianity as follows:

1. The hierarchically tiered god which assumes degrees in the divinity
2. The beginningless universe
3. The eternal and unchanging revelation of the ancient *logos*
4. The transmigration of the souls
5. The return of the souls to their heavenly home by knowledge
6. The resurrection of the body.

The first point is opposed to the Christian concept of the Triune God. The second is incompatible with the creation in time, to which one could add the Christian idea of the eschaton, that is, an end to the created world. Three, the uniqueness of the human person of body and soul contravenes a passing of the soul to another body, and thereby inflating the idea of unique personhood. Fourth, that it is not by knowledge, or philosophical *θεωρία* by which the human person returns to God but by faith, and the 'paradoxical act of grace'.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the resurrection of the body implies the ultimate individuality of the human person whose bodily individuality is not a burden which ought to be discarded, but something which will be transfigured by God at the end of times.

Dörrie drew a provocative line between Christianity and Platonism.<sup>9</sup> The thesis about the incompatibility of the two theologies, however, went against the opinion of many who held a more irenic approach. Dörrie's assessment was criticized and rejected by two fellow historians of the subject, Eginhard Meijering and Cornelia de Vogel.

Meijering rejected the very idea that Christianity and Platonism could be clearly divided.<sup>10</sup> His main objection is based on the idea of historicity. One cannot assume that the understanding of the Creed was interpreted in the same way during the early Christian centuries, as it is today.<sup>11</sup> Applying such a standard would deprive theology of its history. The meaning of the same creedal formulae meant different things in different times. Meijering also called attention to the fact that the primary targets of the dogmatic developments were the Gnostics and the Arians, and not the Platonists. In order to meet their challenge the Church often relied on Platonic concepts in a neutral sense, which, in turn did become part of their natural language and thereby influenced even basic ideas. Meijering offers the example of the creation of the soul. According to the standard metaphysics of the period, whatever is generated, is also perishable. How come then that the soul remains immortal despite being created by God? To which Irenaeus answer is based on *Timaeus* 41a–b, where the demiurge grants immortality to the newly created 'young gods' by his superior power.<sup>12</sup> For the solution of the contradiction between the eternal *logos* of the Platonists and the historical action of God, which would imply changes in the divine will, the answers had to rely on the Platonist assumption of the eternal ideas (here: eternal counsel) of God. Finally, concerning the consubstantiality of the Trinity, Meijering mentions the difficulties of its acceptance even for the 'orthodox' Fathers.

De Vogel proposed a more accommodating line. Her main arguments were based on such 'borderline' cases, such as Clement, Origen, or Synesius. She also shows a clear case of appropriation in the Ninth Epistle of the *CD* where fire is attributed to God as to the

cause, to the divine idea as subsistence, and to the angels as participation, an adoption from Proclus' *Elements of Theology* n. 65.<sup>13</sup> Her final answer is that firstly, Christianity did share certain basic insights with Platonism, such as there being a primary, perfect, and absolute reality beyond the changeable and imperfect one, and that the absolute is of higher significance. This fundamental aspect has consequences for human life and requires a special attention to the soul. Secondly, Platonic philosophy offered the tools for a rational conceptualization of what could be learned from the Scriptures, 'deepening and confirming their Christian belief'.<sup>14</sup>

Against the background of this debate what can be said about the pre-eminent case for Platonism, the *CD*?

## THE CHRISTIANITY OF DIONYSIUS

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We begin by putting to work the criteria of Dörrie. Adopting these requirements the *CD* yields interesting results. As to the first point, it is not difficult to find in the *CD* clear references to the Trinity.<sup>15</sup> As to the problem of creation 'the transcendent Deity has out of goodness established the existence of everything and brought it into being'.<sup>16</sup> Goodness in the divinity, however, could mean a goodness of nature which would—as a force manifesting itself—imply a *natural* tendency to share itself and bring about other beings. In the *CD*, however, three points can be raised against such an emanationist interpretation. First, since God is ὑπερούσιος, God does not have a nature. Second, God is not 'good' in the ordinary sense. In the *Mystical Theology* God is addressed as ὑπεράγαθε, that is, 'beyond goodness'.<sup>17</sup> God's existence is ὑπεραγαθότητος ὑπερύπαρξις, the 'beyond-there-being beyond-goodness'.<sup>18</sup> Third, the 'goodness' of God becomes manifest in the creation as the result of fatherly philanthropy, πατρικὴ φιланθρωπία.<sup>19</sup> The love towards mankind, as love, is an emotion which only a person can feel. Of course, the divine love is a special form of love, θεαρχικὴ φιλανθρωπία, but it is never denied of God in the *CD* as part of the *via negativa*. (There is no such use of φιλανθρωπία in Proclus.)

The next point of Dörrie pertains the return of the souls. In this case the *CD* always refers to the ascent, but as a way opened up by the Incarnation.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the resurrection of the dead is explicitly treated by the *CD* in last chapter of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (henceforth EH).<sup>21</sup>

Taking the criteria of Dörrie as a benchmark, we hope that even these short summaries clearly show an author of Christian conviction. However, these abstract theological issues, clad in the *recherché* character of Dionysius' language, could be explained away as lip service to the Christian environment.

Moving over to the second part, this essay suggests that there is a decisive issue which offers a more perspicuous proof the Christianity of the author. In his debate with Dörrie, Meijering pointed out that 'the Platonic concept of the immutability of God is not easy to combine with the Creed since it testifies to the historically unique acts of God'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it has been often pointed out that history, that is, the Scripture-based history

of salvation plays little role in the *CD*. For this reason the *CD* is mostly considered as a purely metaphysical theology.

In this second section we endeavour to correct this view. There is much more in the *CD* of biblical history than it is generally acknowledged. However, looking for traces of the presence of salvation history in the corpus, one is first advised to read the text in tune with its peculiar style. Dionysius clearly wrote for an 'initiated', or a learned reader, and one has to heed the allusions and hints in order to decipher the meaning. His deliberate strategy of a sophisticated language speaks to the knowledgeable, whether in his own circles, or among his opponents. As his perhaps younger contemporary, Olympiodorus alludes to the same principle quoting an unnamed authority:

αείδω συνετοῖσιν, θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε βεβήλοις

[I sing for those who understand, the unhallowed should be shown a closed door ... ]

Consequently, we will engage with some less-well-researched terms. The methodological advice is simple: try to trace back the exquisite terms adopted by Dionysius to biblical images.

## REMARKS ON DIONYSIAN ESCHATOLOGY

For a starting point we will look at a remark of Dionysius on the rites of the dead. In the seventh chapter of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, he lists various mistaken views about the destiny of the dead. One of them is criticized as a variant of bodily resurrection:

And others, again,—I don't know how—slipped in some way into materialist (προσύλους) notions, have imagined that the holy calm of perfect beatitude, promised to the saints, is on a level with worldly happiness, and they impiously claim that those who have become equal to the angels enjoy the nourishment typical of mutable life. No sacred men will ever fall into such error ...<sup>23</sup>

In this passage the author of the *CD* clearly rejects the possibility that at the end of times there will come an earthly reign of the saints with the Christ. He does not specify whether this would be a temporary, or a final reign according to the proponents, but what he rejects is clearly a version of chiliasm. The disavowal by Dionysius of the doctrine of the earthly happiness of the blessed at the end of times has been noted by scholars, but its far-reaching implications have been rarely spelled out.

It was a basic theological insight of early Christianity that the eschaton, that is, the conjoined events of the Second Coming, the Resurrection, the Last Judgement, that is, the onset of the Kingdom of God are beyond this world.<sup>24</sup> The End of Times is a transcendent event, which means that it is beyond history. The eschaton, therefore, is always nearby, it is always close since it is not bound by the chronological order of the created



world. The transcendent character of the end-of-time events was clearly seen by most early Christian theologians, based on the interpretation of scriptural passages such as 'the day of the Lord will come as a thief'.<sup>25</sup>

Having established that, it still remains a problem that how does this transcendent event relate to the created realm, in other words, how are the events of history, especially the events of salvation history connected to this transcendent end? Are there premonitions of the End already present? Can the End be calculated?<sup>26</sup> Or will the history of salvation be consummated already in some form before the End? If the latter, what are the signs of this fulfilment?

According to one alternative the world is already living in anticipation of the eschaton, that is, in the shadow of the End. 'The mystery of iniquity is already at work' (2 Thessalonians 2:7), Satan is at loose, and the onset of the Antichrist is withheld only by the equally mysterious *katechon*.

According to the other alternative, the End is only to be expected after the history of salvation comes to completion. In other words, there are certain final events to be expected before the Second Coming. Such would be the completion of the number of the saints (as in chapters 4 and 5 in Ezra or Rev 6, 11), or that all the nations, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη should convert, or, like what Dionysius is rejecting, there should be an inner-cosmic reign of the saints on earth.<sup>27</sup> The important point is not the reign of the saints, but its location in time and its temporal duration. Dionysius clearly eschews the view that this would be *within* history, since it would imply a temporal extension. Since a temporal reign is necessarily immanent, it would pull thereby the event of the Second Coming into the world, and make it an inner-historical event.

It seems, therefore, that Dionysius had a pretty clear understanding of the transcendent character of the End of Times. It is not 'apocalyptic' in the ordinary sense, speculating about the events of the final times in vivid pictures. We would look for such 'apocalyptic' passages in Dionysius in vain. However, he evidently considered the theological implications important enough to offer a definite rejection of it. The eschatological implications of this passage is a clear hint of the presence of the 'orthodox' biblical view of the history of salvation.

## A DIVINE PLAN FOR THE NATIONS

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As a proof for the wider background there is a clear reference to the Scriptures as a whole in EH 3, 4.<sup>28</sup>

The sacred scriptural plaques have a lesson for those capable of being divinized, being rooted in the sacred and godlike upliftings of the sacraments. They teach that God himself thus gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists, including the legal hierarchy and society. [This is a clear reference to the Law, as beginning with Genesis and continuing with the First Law.] They lay down the divisions by lot, the distribution and the sharing that have to do with God's people.

[This passage is a special allusion to Deut. 32:8–9, a central passage for the theology of history, as we shall see below.] They teach the lore of holy judges, of wise kings and of priests who live in God. [A reference to the historical books.] They express the powerful and unshakable point of view which enabled our forefathers to endure various and numerous misfortunes [Book of Job]. From them come wise guidelines for living [Books of Wisdom], the songs which gloriously depict the love of God [Song of Songs, which might be directed against Theodore of Mopsuestia], the prophecies regarding the future [the Prophets], the divine works of Jesus the man [Synoptic Gospels], the god-given and god-imitating communities of his disciples [Acts], and the sacred teachings [Epistles]. Here is the hidden and mystical vision of that inspired man who was the most beloved of the disciples [the Apocalypse—an interesting support for its canonicity, probably well before Andrew of Caesarea], and the transcendent theology concerning Jesus [Gospel of John] explained for those who are capable of receiving it. Furthermore, the divine songs [Psalms] praise all the theology concerning God and all his works and laud everything divinely said and everything divinely accomplished by men of God. They are a poetic narrative of all divine things and they enable everyone who participates in a godly spirit always to receive and to pass on the sacrament of the hierarchy

Let us return, however, to the special mention of Deuteronomy 32:8. This verse, according to the LXX says that:

When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam; he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God.

This famous verse served in the early Christian period as the spring board for the idea that God assigned angels to every nation, as their overseers.<sup>29</sup> As a distinction God assigned the archangel Michael to the Jewish nation, the Elect People.<sup>30</sup> The verse is of crucial importance in the history of salvation, since this event signals the birth of the nations, which implies the beginning of the divisions of mankind. This primary division results in the division between the People of God and all those, who refuse God for the sake of their own gods, the idols. These nations constitute the gentiles [τὰ ἔθνη], and the angels are offering prayers for their salvation.<sup>31</sup>

Both rabbinic and early Christian authors identify this event at the Tower of Babel with the birth of the nations. This is where the confusion of the languages happens, and where idolatry begins. On the command of God the angels are assigned to the nations to teach them their languages, and then the nations turn away from God in their self-love towards their own false gods, that is, worshipping the angels of the nations. The doctrine was widespread in early Christianity, via the Book of Jubilees, or the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, or via the many allusions in the intertestamental literature. Interestingly, all of the elements relating to the theology of the angels of the nations can be found among scattered hints in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.

The most explicit allusion to these events can be found in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, where the *CD* devotes four sections of the ninth chapter [2–4] to the problem. It is an indication that Dionysius clearly saw the issues at stake.

'Someone might ask why it was that only the Hebrew people were lifted up to the divine enlightenment. The answer to this is that the angels have fully done their work of guardianship and that it is no fault of theirs if other nations wandered off into the cult of false gods. Indeed it was on their own initiative that these others abandoned the good uplifting toward the divine. Their irrational worship of what they took to be god-pleasing was an index of selfishness and presumption, and this can be proved by what happened to the Hebrew people. 'You rejected the knowledge' of God, it says, and you followed the call of your heart. Our way of life is not predetermined and the free will of those benefiting from the gift of divine Light does not take away from such light its attribute of being a providential source of enlightenment . . . All this can be said of the other nations, those peoples from whom we ourselves are come . . . There is one universal source and it is toward this source that the angels, charged with the sacred and hierarchical direction of each nation, led those willing to follow them.<sup>32</sup>

The account of Dionysius is surprisingly close to the account given by the Testamentum Naphthali. The nations are given freedom to make their choice, and therefore they are responsible for their own lot. Dionysius doesn't say it explicitly, only implies that the Hebrews chose the right way, even if they later deviated from God, and had to be brought back to the right worship by divine chastisement.

God, however, as the lover of humankind, φιλόανθρωπος, did not want to see humanity—and not just the individual soul—get lost. He disciplined mankind, including Israel with the 'scourge of God', if it was necessary, but all this was for the sole purpose of helping mankind to return to Him.

Now God, out of his fatherly love for humanity, chastised Israel so as to return it to the road of sacred salvation. In order to cause a change of heart he handed Israel over to the vengeance of the barbarian nations. This was to ensure that the men who were under his special providence would be transformed for the better. Later, in his kindness, he released Israel from captivity and restored it to its former state of contentment. Zechariah, a theologian, had a vision concerning this. . . . [an angel], . . . was entrusted to initiate the theologian [Zechariah] that 'Jerusalem will be fully inhabited once again with crowds of people'.<sup>33</sup>

The 'cruel and wild nations' showing up in the history of Israel are of course the gentiles. Their untamed nature and cruelty as a consequence of their self-love and idolatry result in a permanent state of war—a commonplace in patristic literature.

The salvation of the fallen mankind, however, falls to the supernatural goodness of the Christ. The angels can plead for the nations, can lament about their evil-doings, but cannot save them. In the eighth epistle Dionysius says that:

Let us not be satisfied to praise the gentleness of sacred men or the generosity of those angels, the friends of humans, who pity the nations and plead to God on their behalf, who punish the destructive and evil-doing hordes, who lament for the wicked, who rejoice over those summoned back to goodness, . . . Instead, let us quietly receive the beneficent rays of the truly good, the transcendently good Christ . . . After all is it

not characteristic of his unspeakable, incomprehensible goodness that he ... wishes everything ... to have fellowship with him according to its fitness? Does he not come lovingly to those who have turned away from him? Does he not contend with them and beg them not to spurn his love?<sup>34</sup>

These texts, I hope, show that there is a clear theology of the nations in the *CD*, which is remarkably consistent with early Christian salvation-historical views. The author thinks in terms of the whole of humanity, not just the mystical ascent of the individual soul, and that can only be accomplished with an eye on the history of salvation.<sup>35</sup>

It is probably less surprising now that there are many other terms employed by Dionysius which express ideas related to the social and moral order of the world, even if these terms are not necessarily obvious for the reader.

## HIERARCHY AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

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As the third part, while speaking about the role of salvation history in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, one should not forget about the role of hierarchy either. The well-known definition of hierarchy is a divinely arranged order of the created realm.<sup>36</sup>

We suggest that there is an aspect of this multivalent term which points in the direction of political theology. The concept of hierarchy expresses not only that God is creator and provider of order for the whole cosmos, but—in fact, by this creative act itself—He is also the legislator of His creation. The creator in this sense is also a ruler, a king. This role is quite clearly present in the term *θεαρχία*, where the component term *ἀρχή* means rule and sovereignty, and therefore, perhaps, it could be translated in this context as ‘sovereign divine rule’.

That this interpretation is not that far-fetched can be supported by looking at the role of the term *θεσμός* in the *CD*. The term occurs thirty times in the corpus, in various forms, together with *θεσμοθέτης*, and *θεσμοθεσία*. There are three things to be observed. First, that the *θεσμοθέται* were called the ‘junior archons’ in Athens. The details of their office is not important. The term used by Dionysius, however, is sufficiently well associated with Athens, and adds to his purported credibility, hinting at his job as a judge on the Areopagus.

More importantly, however, *θεσμός* is a term associated with the highest level of legislation in the city. God is *θεσμοθέτης* for Dionysius, that is, God sovereignly establishes the divine law for the world. It is to be noted that *θεσμοθέτης* is clearly distinguished by Dionysius from *νομοθέτης*. *Θεσμός* is the divine law, while *νόμος* is the law of the realm.<sup>37</sup> Moses is *νομοθέτης*, while it is God, who is the author of the divine law, the *θεσμός*.

Of course, one could immediately note that this distinction is already available in Proclus, who says the same thing in the *Timaeus* commentary.

The θεσμός, I think, contains more than the νόμος in the sense that God is better than the intellect. We say that the νόμος, the law is the dispensation of the intellect, while the divine order and the unifying determinations we call θεσμός.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, in the second chapter of Ep. 9 Dionysius employs a similar distinction:

... the theologians [the writers of ancient Scriptures] in their consideration of a theme look at it sometimes in a political and legal perspective and sometimes purely and without any mixture with anything else. They look at it sometimes at the human and intermediate level, sometimes in a transcendent mode and in the context of perfection. Sometimes they rely on the laws governing visible things [ἀπὸ τῶν νόμων τῶν φαινομένων], sometimes on the divine law of invisible things [ἀπὸ τῶν ἀφανῶν θεσμῶν]...<sup>39</sup>

There is a difference, however. According to Dionysius, God is beyond polity. In the *Mystical Theology* Dionysius says that the first principle is 'neither kingdom, nor wisdom'.<sup>40</sup> In our interpretation within this essay, this denial wants to prevent the identification of God with a particular sense of kingdom, or rule, or νόμος. God is 'not kingdom', since He is a sovereign judge of the divine law, which clearly means that he is not bound by Ἀδράστεια or εἰμαρμένη, or Δίκη like the demiurge of Proclus. For Proclus the cosmos is indeed a great political entity, which is brought about by the demiurge, who, however, subjects it to Ἀδραστείας θεσμοί, and οἱ τῆς εἰμαρμένης νόμοι. Dionysius retains the distinction, but he uses this as an expression of God's sovereign will.

There is a very interesting application of this distinction in the Eighth Epistle. 'Miriam became leprous when she undertook laying down the law for the lawgiver'. This translation, however, is defective both in Hathaway and Luibheid. The latter translates 'who tried to dominate the lawgiver'. The Greek clause is more telling: 'who attempted to impart divine law to the lawgiver', καὶ Μαριάμ λεπροῦται τῷ νομοθέτῃ θεσμοθετεῖν ἐγχειρήσασα.<sup>41</sup> Miriam tried to usurp the role of the divine, and this is why she received her punishment.

The careful use of the term θεσμοθεσία can be observed in another remark, too. Here Dionysius speaks about the transgression of Paradise. Since in Paradise there is only divine law, but no law of the realm yet, it is duly termed as 'revolt and the transgression of the divine law in the Paradise', ἀποστασία καὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐν παραδείσῳ θεσμοθεσίας ὑπερβασία.<sup>42</sup> The divine law, the *thesmos* overrules nature, as it is explicitly said in the Divine Names about the supernatural birth of Jesus, or other miracles.<sup>43</sup>

God then is a ruler and a sovereign. In the twelfth chapter of the Divine Names, Dionysius lists what we call the 'political names' of God. These are the biblical formulae 'King of Kings', 'who rules for all eternity, to the very end of eternity and beyond', and that God is 'Lord of lords' and 'God of gods'. In the explanations he adds that:

Kingship is the power to arrange every border, realm, law, and order. Lordship is not simply a matter of being superior with respect to inferiors but a complete possession

of all that is beautiful and good, and is furthermore a true and unshakable stability. The word is derived from the idea of 'lording,' 'having the capacity to lord,' and 'actually lording'.<sup>44</sup>

The divine rule is directed to unity and peace, but this will not go without struggle. In fact, a whole section is devoted in the EH to the 'sacred contests' (ἀγῶνες) in which Christ is called the trainer (ἀθλοθέτης) as creator, wise as the maker of the rules, and as beautiful, since He is the worthy prize for the winners, 'and, more divinely, as goodness is present with the athletes, defending their freedom and guaranteeing their victory over the forces of death and destruction'.<sup>45</sup>

The nature of the divine rule is further specified when Dionysius explains that this rule is based on the boundless goodness of God towards mankind, that is, on his philanthropy. God acts not by force—a point repeatedly stressed by Dionysius—'not through overwhelming force, but, as scripture mysteriously tells us, by an act of judgment and also in all righteousness'<sup>46</sup>, paraphrasing Isaiah 42,1–4.

The divine rule is again and again characterized by justice, philanthropy (a Hellenistic appellation of the good ruler, who leads his troops to victory, and cares for the well-being of his subjects), order, and peace. The bishop (the hierarch) therefore sings the praise 'of the divinity which rescues us all from unjust and tyrannical power and leads us instead to his own most just judgments'.<sup>47</sup>

The angelic orders in heaven learn that 'the King of Glory', that is, the one raised up into the heavens in a human form, is the 'Lord of the heavenly powers. [...] Jesus himself who is their instructor, teaching them directly about the kindly work he has undertaken out of love for man. "I speak of righteousness and of saving judgment"'.<sup>48</sup>

These passages show a rather unusual face of Dionysius since these speak a language much simpler than the kind of language he is famous for. Over and above the familiar types of Dionysian theology, kataphatic, apophatic, and symbolic, here another kind of language seems to be at work. In fact, Dionysius himself speaks about a certain type of theology, which hasn't drawn much attention. In the Ninth Epistle he identifies two kinds of theology, one which is inexpressible and requires initiation (ἀπόρητον καὶ μυστικήν), and the second, which is 'manifest and better known' (ἐμφανής καὶ γνωριμωτέρα). This is the 'clear theology' mentioned in the first chapter to the Ninth Epistle.<sup>49</sup> 'All those who hear a clear (σαφής) *theologia* without symbols weave in themselves a sort of model, which guides them to an understanding of such a *θεολογία*.' The first is for the impassible part of the soul, while the second is for the passible.<sup>50</sup> Against Hathaway, we think that the commentary on this passage by Maximus the Confessor is correct.<sup>51</sup> This is the kind of theology which is presented in the accounts of the prophets, where God speaks without 'typical symbolism' (τυπωτικά σύμβολα).

Hence we suggest that Hathaway is clearly mistaken when in his commentary on the Letters he arrives at a very negative view of the political aspects of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in general. He declares that 'The Letters of Ps.-Dionysius are an example of the fatal weakness of any alliance of Neoplatonism with Christian faith. Neither Neoplatonism nor Christian faith seem capable of producing a political philosophy'.<sup>52</sup>

Hathaway seems to look in the wrong direction. While it can hardly be termed as 'political philosophy', Dionysius does have a theology of history, which is in itself a political idea, since according to the scriptural account divine history is ultimately about the Elect Nation, the Church, and its nature.

Whether one looks at the question in its entirety or in individual detail theirs [the theologians] is not a discourse totally in the bare historical domain but one which has to do with life-giving perfection.<sup>53</sup>

How this holy, like-minded, peaceful community of the whole of humankind would look like, indeed remains in the background. Dionysius is not giving explicit advice for the accomplishment of this task. Continuing the previous quotation he says that:

He who sets himself in order (τάξας ἑαυτόν) will set another in order; and who sets another in order, also a home; and who, a home, also a city; and who, a city, a nation; and in a word, as the Oracles say, he who is faithful in little is faithful in much, but he who is faithless in little is also faithless in much.<sup>54</sup>

In this text order is τάξις, which means arranged order, like that of the battle line. Dionysius employs the verbal form, τάξει, which means that this is an active arrangement and ordering, and not the theological concept of the metaphysical hierarchy.

## CONCLUSION

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In this limited investigation we have tried to collect and join together some elements of Dionysius' theology, focusing on his views on salvation history, and his implicit political theology. For this we look at such ideas as the angels of the nations, the role of the archangel Michael, and his views on eschatology, which proved to be communitarian and not individualistic. The terms such as 'sovereignty', 'kingdom', not forgetting 'peace' are concepts which are especially indicative of the political point of view. Some other terms, however, had to remain in the background, like the important terms of unity, like-mindedness, analogy, or an analysis of the holy nation, the θεῖος or ἱερὸς λαός, which is always used terminologically (that is, following the biblical usage) for the 'people of God' be it Israel or the Church.

We hope to have shown, however, that despite the disquieting language of the *CD* there emerge complex hints concerning the theology of history, consistent with the contemporary understanding of scriptural principles. From this point of view the *Corpus Dionysiacum* clearly contains parts which are not derived from contemporary Platonic influences, but carry biblical ideas, and thereby shows a distinctively Christian theological commitment. If one was looking for an answer, whether there are specifically Christian doctrines in the *CD*, then this would be one way to answer it.



The intention of the author of the *CD*, however, remains a mystery. No convincing explanation has been given so far for the complicated nature of these writings. However, the *CD* seems to have been intent on offering a salvation-historical corrective to his otherwise predominantly metaphysical view of the divinely created and providentially directed world.

## NOTES

1. I will quote the treatises according to the editions of Suchla, Heil, and Ritter (see General Bibliography in this volume). For an English translation I relied on Luibheid 1987.
2. Koch 1900: ix.
3. Two recent bibliographies might offer an overview of the many and varied studies on the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Timofeev 2015; Constanas 2003. These bibliographies are complementary of each other. Neither of these lists, however, the important older studies of Koch 1900 and Stiglmayr 1911.
4. While there is a majority view that the author of the *CD* was Christian, there are recurrent attempts to claim the *CD* for the Neoplatonic fold. E.g. Lankila 2011, who reviews the earlier interpretations in this vein.
5. Wittgenstein 1958: I.43. Also Benveniste 1974: 226.
6. Dörrie 1971.
7. Dörrie, 1971, 522.
8. Dörrie, 1971, 522.
9. Concerning Origen a similar position is offered by Edwards 2002.
10. Meijering 1974.
11. Meijering, 16.
12. Meijering, 24.
13. De Vogel 1985: 52.
14. De Vogel, 1985, 54–55.
15. ὅτι μόνος ἐστὶ καὶ ἓνας τρισυπόστατος CH 7, 4 (39,9 Heil = PG 3: 212C) or τριφανῆς θεωρία (29, 9 Heil = PG 3: 208C) ἐναρχικὴ τριάς (DN). Rorem in his commentary list further cases for the expression. ‘In three persons’ or ‘tri-hypostatic’ [ ... ] trinitarian terminology [ ... ] also [ ... ] in DN 1 592A 1, EH 2 396D 43f. and EH 6 533B 25f.” (Luibheid 1987: 166).
16. πάσας ἢ ὑπερούσιος θεαρχία τὰς τῶν ὄντων οὐσίας ὑποστήσασα πρὸς τὸ εἶναι παρήγαγεν CH 4,1 (20, 9–10 Heil = PG 3:177C).
17. MT 1, 1 (141, 3 Ritter = PG 3:997A). Also DN 2, 4 (126, 16 Suchla = PG 3:641A).
18. Luibheid translates the phrase as ‘transcendent Goodness transcendently there’ (p. 54), but this is not expressive enough of the idea which means that God is over and above goodness in the ordinary sense. Such goodness has to be denied of God. The paradoxical formula ἢ ὑπεράγαθος ἀγαθότης DN 2, 4 (126, 16 Suchla = PG 3:641A) points to a very different kind of goodness which is certainly not a positive characteristic.
19. CH 8, 2 (34, 17 Heil = PG 3: 241A).
20. EH 12 (92,21–93,3 Ritter = PG: 444A).
21. ἢ ἱερά παλιγγενεσία EH 7, 1 (120, 23 Heil = PG 3: 553A); 7, 3 (122, 15 = PG 3: 556B); (123, 23 = PG 3: 557A).
22. Meijering, 18.

23. "Ἄλλοι δὲ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἐπὶ προσύλους ἐννοίας ἀποκλιθέντες εἰρήκασιν ὁμοειδῆ τοῦ τῆδε βίου τὴν τοῖς ὁσίοις ἐπηγγελμένην ἀγιωτάτην καὶ μακαριστὴν λῆξιν καὶ τροφὰς οἰκείας ἀλλοιωτῶ βίῳ τοῖς ἰσαγγέλοις ἀθεμίτως ἀπέρριψαν. Ἄλλ' οὐκ ἀποπεσεῖται τίς ποτε τῶν ἱερωτάτων ἀνδρῶν εἰς τὰς τοιαύσδε πλανήσεις... CH 7, 2 (121,18--22 Heil = PG 3:553CD) translation by Luibheid.
24. The CD mentions in many places the Kingdom of God, DN 1,7 (119, 12 Suchla = PG 3: 596C); 5, 4 (183,5--6 Suchla = 817D); 10, 3 (217,4 = 948C); 12, 1 (224,3 Suchla = PG 3:969B);
25. Mt. 24, 43; Lk. 12,39 and 1 Th. 5, 2.
26. See Lohse, 1967 and the exchange about this issue between Hesychius of Salona and Augustine in epistles 197, 198, 199 of Augustine in S. Augustini Epistolae pars IV. ed. A. Goldbacher, Vienna – Leipzig, 1911. 235-292. CSEL 57
27. 4 Ezra 4,34; 5,36. 'Then I answered and said, How, and when shall these things come to pass? wherefore are our years few and evil? And he (Uriel) answered me, saying, Do not thou hasten above the most Highest: for thy haste is in vain to be above him, for thou hast much exceeded. Did not the souls also of the righteous ask question of these things in their chambers, saying, How long shall I hope on this fashion? when cometh the fruit of the floor of our reward? And unto these things Uriel the archangel gave them answer, and said, Even when the number of seeds is filled in you: for he hath weighed the world in the balance.' — 'Number me the things that are not yet come..'
28. PG 3: 429CD / 83,13--84,1 ed. Heil, trans. Luibheid, adjusted.
29. For the 'angels of the nations' and the accounts of the events surrounding the Tower of Babel, see Geréby 2019.
30. That Michael is assigned to the Jews is mentioned twice in the EH: 9, 2 (37, 14 Heil = PG 3: 260B) and 9, 4 (39, 19 Heil = PG 3: 261D).
31. Ep. 8, 1, 31 (173, 6--13 Ritter = PG 3: 1085C)
32. CH 9, 3 (37,17--38,20 Heil = PG3:260C) Emphases are mine—GG.
33. 34, 20--35,1 Heil = PG 3: 241A Luibheid 168.
34. PG 3: 1085D
35. Louth 1989: 131 defends the CD against the charge that it favours private mysticism. The case can be made even stronger.
36. CH 3, 1.
37. The νόμος is given by the angels (and not by God) in CH 4, 2 (21,15 Heil = PG 3: 177C).
38. ἔχει γάρ, οἶμαι, τι καὶ τοῦ νόμου πλεόν ὁ θεσμός, καθ' ὅσον καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ νοῦ κρείττων νοῦ μὲν γὰρ διανομὴν εἶναι φαμεν τὸν νόμον, θεῖαν δὲ τάξιν καὶ ὄρον ἐνοειδῆ τὸν θεσμόν. Proclus, *In Tim* 3, 301, 21--24
39. 198,15--199,6 Ritter = PG 3: 1108C p. 284 (adjusted) Καὶ αὐτὴ δὲ τοῦ φαινομένου παντὸς ἡ κοσμοουργία τῶν ἀοράτων τοῦ θεοῦ προβέβληται, καθάπερ φησὶ Παῦλος τε καὶ ὁ ἀληθὴς λόγος. Διὸ καὶ οἱ θεολόγοι τὰ μὲν πολιτικῶς καὶ ἐννόμως ἐπισκοποῦσι, τὰ δὲ καθαρτικῶς καὶ ἀχράντως, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀνθρωπικῶς καὶ μέσως, τὰ δὲ ὑπερκοσμίως καὶ τελεσιουργικῶς· καὶ τότε μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν νόμων τῶν φαινομένων, τότε δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀφανῶν θεσμῶν κατὰ τὸ προσήκον τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἱεροῖς γράμμασι καὶ νοῖς καὶ ψυχαῖς. Οὐ γὰρ ἱστορίαν ψιλήν, ἀλλὰ ζωτικὴν ἔχει τελείωσιν ὁ προκείμενος αὐτοῖς ἅπας τε καὶ διὰ πάντων λόγος.
40. MT 5 (149,8 Ritter = PG 3: 1048A)
41. Ep. 8, 1, 109. ed. Ritter = PG 3: 1089C. Hathaway 144; Luibheid 274.
42. EH 3,3.11 (90, 20 Ritter = PG 3, 440C).
43. DN II, 10 = 133, 9
44. DN 12, 1--2. PG 3: 986C = Luibheid 126.

45. EH 2,6. PG 3:401D–404B, 77,11–24 Heid = Luibheid 207.
46. EH 91, 16–7 = PG 3:441B. Luibheid, 221.
47. EH 7, 3. PG 3: 557B = 124,4–7. Luibheid 252.
48. CH 7, 3. PG 3:209B = 30, 4–10 Ritter. Luibheid 164.
49. Ep. 9, 1 (PG 3: 1105D).
50. PG 4: 565CD.
51. PG 4: 566D. Hathaway rejects Maximus' view, p.111, by connecting the phrase rather to Proclus' interpretation of the Timaeus, which on his account is 'not an account, but a myth' (*in Tim.* III 144, 30).
52. Hathaway 125.
53. 198,15–199,6/ PG 3: 1108C, /p. 284 Καὶ αὐτὴ δὲ τοῦ φαινομένου παντὸς ἡ κοσμουργία τῶν ἀοράτων τοῦ θεοῦ προβέβληται, καθάπερ φησὶ Παῦλός τε καὶ ὁ ἀληθὴς λόγος. Διὸ καὶ οἱ θεολόγοι τὰ μὲν πολιτικῶς καὶ ἐννόμως ἐπισκοποῦσι, τὰ δὲ καθαρτικῶς καὶ ἀχράντως, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀνθρωπικῶς καὶ μέσως, τὰ δὲ ὑπερκοσμίως καὶ τελεσιουργικῶς· καὶ τοτὲ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν νόμων τῶν φαινομένων, τοτὲ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀφανῶν θεσμῶν κατὰ τὸ προσήκον τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἱεροῖς γράμμασι καὶ νοῖς καὶ ψυχαῖς. Οὐ γὰρ ἱστορίαν ψιλὴν, ἀλλὰ ζωτικὴν ἔχει τελείωσιν ὁ προκειμένος αὐτοῖς ἅπας τε καὶ διὰ πάντων λόγος. (Translation adjusted–GG)
54. Ep. 8, 3 (PG 3: 1093B).

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